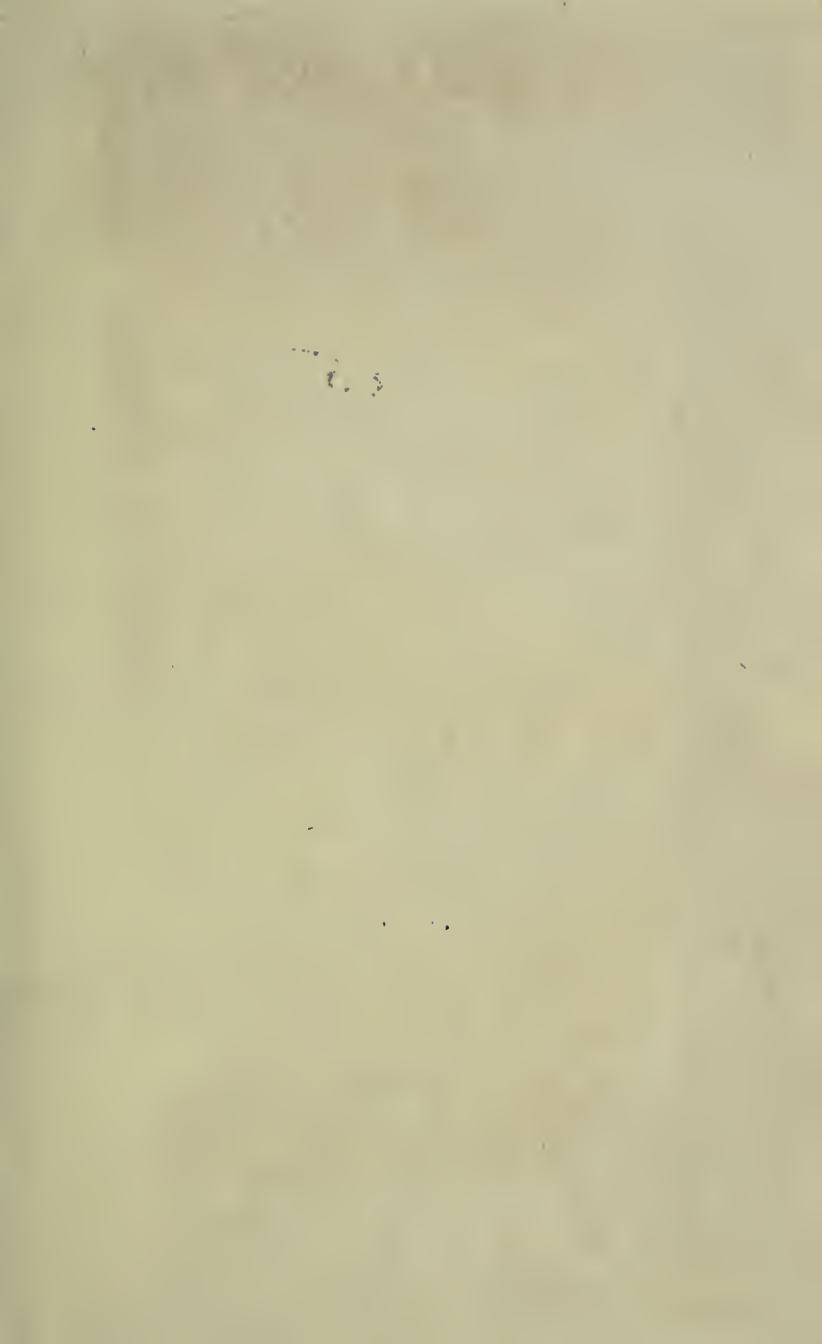


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IRKDALE;

OR,

THE ODD HOUSE IN THE HOLLOW.

VOL. II.

IRKDALE;

OR,

THE ODD HOUSE IN THE HOLLOW.

A LANCASHIRE STORY.

BY

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IRKDALE;

OR,

THE ODD HOUSE IN THE HOLLOW.

CHAPTER I.

THERE is a class of people, with whom accident sometimes brings me in contact, whose love affairs are not of the same romantic character as those of the couple who have just “breathed their fond good night” at the door of the “Odd House.” These seem to go about their courtship as though the heart was unconcerned in the matter, as we do not hear of even a sleepless night being passed through those delicate altercations and subtle jealousies that tend to make the course of true love anything but smooth. But we generally find

such to have passed the summer-time of life, and got into a colder season, so far as the affections are concerned. Those of the harder sex may happen to be widowers, who despair of loving as they have loved before, or bachelors, who find single life grow irksome as age creeps on; whilst of the other they may be widows, with encumbrances, or spinsters, who have remained upon the shelf until they have got out of date, and require dusting and renovating before they are fit for even the old goods market.

It now becomes my duty to introduce the reader to an instance of this unromantic kind of courtship, in which he need not expect finding many tears and sighs, nor to follow the lovers along moonlit walks by hawthorn-scented hedge-rows, or sit with them in bowers of rosy bliss. He must be content to surround himself with humbler scenes and associations than these, and listen to less extravagant language than is sometimes put into the mouths of Cupid's votaries. In short, he must transport himself from the pleasant

slopes of Irkdale to a neighbourhood where the Irk appears to have “missed its way,” and got into a very dirty and disreputable course of life, by which, instead of roving amongst and kissing flowery banks, “o’erhung with wildwood, thickening green,” it has become degraded to the occupation of a city scavenger.

In a narrow, sloppy, soot begrimed street (Manchester possesses many such), whence the hubbub of Smithfield market can be heard, and which poverty appears to hold upon a lease that shall expire only as the walls tumble, is a very uninviting entry or passage leading into the precincts of a court that has all the privileges of retirement, if nothing else, to recommend it as a place of desirable residence. In this retreat are two dwellings, the exteriors of which are said to have been whitewashed so recently as to be remembered by the “oldest inhabitant ;” and it is even contended that untaxed glass has found its way up the passage to let in light, and keep out the wind, when either chances to pay a visit to these

dwellings ; but as there are no historical records to support these traditions, we may regard the statement as somewhat mythical.

One of these dwellings, at the time when occurred the later events of this story, was the abode of an old woman who remembered having seen trees growing in King-street, and who had for years past carried on a class of business, the nature of which was indicated by an odorous conglomerate of old ropes, twine, rags, bags, bottles, broken spoons, rusty iron, treacle toffy, marbles, and shuttlecocks. The other was occupied by a younger female, who, for a living, cleaned offices and warehouses, sometimes augmenting her small income by humble investments in turf speculations. The interior of this latter dwelling, though wretchedly furnished, had indications of neatness that the former did not possess. There was a lame bedstead, one corner of which was supported by two bricks and a rotten deal box. Some apology for curtains hung in scanty folds across the near side, when it was not required for sitting purposes,

and several nameless patches of upholstery figured here and there about it. A mug stood under a water-tap in one corner of the room ; two almost bottomless chairs, not at all twins, nor even relations, broke the monotony of a bare crumbling wall ; and a ricketty deal table, whose disk, through having suffered from the scarcity of firewood, resembled the moon a few nights from its full, stood beneath the window, covered by an article that would require a considerable stretch of inventive genius to make it out to be a cloth. Add a few scraps of crockery ware that occupied a slung shelf in the chimney nook, a saucepan that was seldom removed beyond the hob, a candlestick, a tea-caddy, and an asthmatical pair of bellows, and you get a complete inventory of what the house contained.

The lady of this domicile had just given her Saturday evening's touch to the floor by sketching sundry devices with potmould about the hearth and the door, when her ear caught the sound of a familiar voice coming from the contiguous street.

“ Fresh tripe an’ trotters ! ribs o’ beef an’ legs o’ mutton for a penny ! Paes all hot ! ” was sung out opposite the entry ; and directly the well-known physiognomy of our friend Pothook, beneath which his newly-supplied basket and polished pea-can were silently eloquent of the luxuries they contained, presented itself to the welcoming smiles of the lady before named.

“ Well, owd wench, theaw’rt spreedin’ thy carpet, I see,” observed the tripe and trotter merchant, setting down his can, and hitching his basket to a more easy position on his arm. “ Cont’ do wi’ owt i’ my road t’ neet ? ”

“ You may leave me a few peas and a little tripe,” said the other. “ I can’t afford trotters.”

“ Well, there’s a lump o’ beef here abeawt th’ breadth of a tinker’s appern I’ll leeave thee. It should ha’ been two-penn’orth, but theaw con have it for a penny, bein’ as theawt an owd chum, like,” and Pothook gave a peculiarly expressive wink, which would have

caused the other to blush, only she had not yet put on her paint. "What dost' say to me comin' in an' havin' a pipe wi' thee?"

"Oh, if you please, come in."

Our friend at this invitation took up his can, and after a struggle to pass the door, which had been constructed without consideration for crinoline and tripe baskets, placed his stock-in-trade on the table, and then swung a chair in a very authoritative manner towards the fire.

"Theaw sees, Fan, I've gotten a tidy set-eawt," he observed, motioning towards his basket and can. "I co mysel risin' i'th' woald. Wilt have a pipe wi' me?"

"No, thank you; I don't smoke," replied Fan.

"Well, just as theaw's a mind; theaw'rt welcome. It's bin a warmish sort of a day, has nor it?"

"Indeed it has, very."

"Nice hay weather for thoose ut han begun o' cuttin'."

"I suppose it is."

“Theaw gets a bit o’ sun i’ this oction sometimes, I reckon?”

“About two hours in the day if the weather be fine.”

“I never get so mich as a wink i’ yon wareheawse o’ mine. It’s as coud just neaw as th’ inside of a pop-bottle. I think I’se hardly winter in it agen.”

“Do you think you’ll remove, then?”

“Well, I have had some very sayrious thowts abeawt it. Theaw sees yon’s hardly th’ place for respectable tradesmen; an’ one’s liket’ keep up a bit of a carikter i’th’ woald.

“Where do you suppose you’ll be removing to?”

“I con hardly tell thee yet. I dunno think it ’ll be toart Cheetham Hill or Greenheys. I’m noa quite hee enough i’th’ woald for sich places as thoose; though I’m going in for th’ quality straightforrud. Theaw’rt mid-dlin’ snug here, Fan.”

“Well, the place is poor, but very quiet.”

“Dost ever find it *too* quiet?”

“Oh, no; I like it the better for that.”

“ Art never feeart o’ thieves ? ”

“ No ; what is there for them to steal ? ”

“ Nor nowty folk ? ”

“ No ; I’ve done nobody any harm, that I know of.”

“ Nor boggarts ? ”

“ Boggarts ! What are they ? ” and Fan turned an inquiring look towards her friend, as if she half divined his meaning, whilst a slight feeling of terror was expressed by the tone in which she spoke.

“ Boggarts,” said Pothook, speaking in a subdued voice, as though he was afraid of conjuring one in his presence, “ are gettin’ quite i’th’ fashin neaw ; an’ ther’s a decal o’ different sorts knockin’ abeawt. It wur thowt onet ut railroads an’ factories had driven ’em a’ away ; but ther comin’ up agen as fresh an’ as fearin’ as ever.”

“ But are they alive, Pothook ; are they wick ? ”

“ Wick ! By th’ Mass, I think they are. Boggarts i’ my grondfeyther days, theaw sees, wurn rayther slow, an’ chiefly hung abeawt

church-yards, an' quiet lonely places, same as th' Boggart-Ho Cloof.* But ther's a fresh breed *on* 'em comn o'er fro' Ameriky, an' ther playin' the deuce i'th' country.

“ You don't say so.”

“ Yoi; they con creep through folk's key-holes like winkin', an' make tables an' cheears doance abeawt like Little Gorton at a greawt-neet stir.”

“ Isn't it surprising?”

“ Eh, wench, I think it is. But ther's one thing abeawt em'—they'll *wortch* noane.

* This picturesque glen, celebrated throughout South Lancashire for its associations with the supernatural, is thus described by Bamford in his “*Passages in the Life of a Radical*.” “On the left hand, reader, as thou goest towards Manchester, ascending from Blackley, is a rather deep valley, green-swarded, and embowered in plantations and older woods. A driving path, which thou enterest by a white gate hung on whale-jaw posts, leads through a grove of young trees, by a modern and substantial farm-house, with green shutters, sashed windows, and flowers peeping from the sills. A mantle of ivy climbs the wall; a garden is in front, and an orchard, redolent of bloom, and fruit in season, nods on the hill-top in front. Here stood, at one time, a very ancient house, built partly of old-fashioned bricks, and partly of a

They'n do as mich mischief as theaw's a mind, an' talk to thee as lung as owd Ailse o' Beawker's ; but it's like as their fccart o' *wark*."

"Talk, will they?"

"Well, they makken a sort of a rappin' noise at the table, an' folk purtend to reckon they known what it meens."

Just then the table gave a distinet if not an articulate rap, but whether it was the "manifestation" of some mischievous spirit, or was caused by the weight of Pothook's basket, I leave the reader to guess ; but the noise was certainly alarming, and would have been regarded as ominous by people of weak nerves. Fan started on hearing the rap, and turned a look full of fright towards the table.

"Nay," said Pothook, grinning ; "theaw's

timber frame, filled with raddlings and daub (wicker-work, plastered with clay). It was a lone and desolate-looking house indeed ; misty and fearful, even at noon-day. It was known as 'Boggart-Ho,' or 'Fyrin-Ho' ; and the gorge in which it was situated was, and still is known, as 'Boggart,' or 'Fyrin-Ho' Kloof' (or Cloof), the glen of the hall of spirits."

no 'casion to think these new-fanglet boggarts ull have owt to do with an owd rip like *that*. They're a bit shy at *oak*, an winno do ther best grammar beawt it's through two inches thick o' *solid mahogany*. Ther's a chap yonder, i' Moston, ut had gotten one o' these boggarts agate o' comin' a seein' him because he had a nice mahogany table ut wur his gronmoather's, an' he could mak it talk an' doance abeawt as he'd a mind. Well, one day th' bum-bailies coom for a shop-score ut he'd forgotten to pay; an' they set their e'en upo' this table same as a lad does at a nice wench. 'Just give em' a stave o' *Jack's the Lad*,' the chap sed when he see'd th' bailies had fo'n i' love with it; so witheawt moore ado th' table spit ov it honds, as one may say, an' crashed off wi' a doance like heawse o' foyer. Th' bailies turnt their cooat laps toart it in a snifter; an' one *on* 'em *did* stare when it ups wi' it foout an' fot him a crack o'er a tender part of his breeches, as if it understood puncin; an' they a' off wi' 'em like scatter, thinkin' th' Owd Lad had summut to do with

it. Well, th' chap thowt after, for he're a bit gan to idlety, ut if th' boggart, or sperrit as he co'ed it, could do sich manks as thoose, it could do summut else; so he towd it to go to his loom an' wayve a bit for him while he had a walk eawt. But th' divulment wur too fause for him; so it rappt on th' table an' spelt eawt, '*I'm noane sich a foo' as that;*' an' off it went, an' chus whatever he did after he could no' coax it nee th' heawse agen."

"How very strange!" Fan exclaimed.

"Well, ay," said Pothook, drawing on to his purpose, "they are very queer. They liken quiet places too. Wheere ther's a family o' *two* or moore they winno come. Its agen ther natyer."

"Dear me!"

"Neaw, heaw would t' feel," continued Pothook, "if some neet one coom an' laid a cowl hont upo' thy face, an' shaket thy bed-stocks like a lot o' lose teeth?—Titherup! that road," and the fellow gave a jump, and uttered a loud exclamation, as if he actually saw the thing he was describing.

“ Oh, Pothook, how you frighten me ! ”
Fan ejaculated, a sudden terror seizing her.

“ Ay, its summit to be feart on, I con tell thee,” said the other. “ But there’s a *cure*.”

“ And what may it be, pray ? ”

“ Takkin in a lodger.”

“ But I’ve only one room.”

“ Well, if one wurt’ take a walk as far as th’ Owd Church some fine Sunday mornin’, an’ spend four-an’-sixpence theere, an’ three-hawpence ov a ring, theaw sees, one could get o’er that difficulty.” And the trotter merchant winked in the direction of a blank window pane, and plied his pipe rather nervously.

“ Oh, Pothook ! ” gasped Fan, with the “ forlorn hope ” of a sigh at the end of it.

“ I’m in a risin’ business neaw,” continued the swain, “ an’ we con mak one another as comfortable as beggars i’ chaff. What dost say to me bringin’ my furniture here, an’ doin’ things in a grand way ? Ther’s a nice corner theere for my tripe-dressin’.”

What answer Fan might have given to

the proposal of her friend, had she not betrayed a disposition to faint at the outset, is not quite certain; but being taken in the manner she was by the insinuating—wretch, how could she be her own person under such a trial? With a feeling of most becoming restraint, she decided to remain silent for a very short time, and give no reply till she heard further. If younger women would not be so ready at capitulating on the first assault, but hold out until a proper siege was laid to their hearts, how many hasty and unhappy marriages would be avoided! So Fan reasoned during her silence. Pothook had commenced *his* siege in earnest, she thought, and now she awaited further operations.

“Come, what ses ta?” Pothook resumed. “I’m gooin’ at a bargain, an’ I’s be knocked deawn th’ fust bid. It is no’ every day theaw’ll get an offer o’ this sort. No cumbrance, theaw knows, an’ nob’dy else breakin’ ther heart after me. So say th’ word, an’ gie me a bit o’ satisfaction, an’ then I’ll be off wi’ my travellin’ cook-shop, an’ happen co agen when

I've sowd up. Neaw, *yed* or *tail*?" and the fellow tossed up a penny, which being caught in one hand, he covered with the other. A strange method of deciding the matter, certainly; but Fan was bound to say either one thing or the other. After a moment's hesitation, she faintly articulated—

"*Head!*" then covered her face with the corner of her apron.

"It's a *tail*, by owd boots-an'-stockins!" Pothook exclaimed, uncovering the penny, "an' I've won thee i' fair tossin'. Neaw then, we'n be tee'd t'gether as soon as th' job can be managed, an' saddle things straight-forrud."

"But I've not consented yet," said Fan.

"Well, wimmen never dun consent grade-ly till they'n been squeezed a bit," Pothook observed, "but as I'm gettin' too owd for any soft mak o' coartin,—tellin' sweet lies, an' sayin' things ut folk shawm at when they're by theirsels,—I'se just give thee a bit of a squeeze, an' have done with it." So saying, he sprang from his seat, and seizing his *ina-*

morata by the waist, administered such a hug as fairly took away her breath.

“ Oh dear me, Pothook ! how you smother me ! Really, don’t now. You said only once. There now, be satisfied, you audacious man ! ”

The little tripe merchant was bent upon illustrating the adage—*give an inch and take an ell*,—as, instead of giving one hug only, he gave a succession, and made professions of love with increasing vehemence.

“ I nobbut said *one* squeeze, I know,” he remarked, after a protracted round of tender demonstrations, “ but then I like takkin it in i’ numbers, theaw sees, same as owd Jacob did th’ History o’ England ; it comes yessier, an’ lasts longer. Eh, owd wench ! Neaw I’ve mentiont owd Jacob,—I’ve had their Dick at my wareheawse to-day, and I’ve towld him a thing or two ut’s made him beside hissel,” and Pothook again seated himself.

“ You’ve not told him about Alfred and Miss Dashwood, have you ? ” said Fan, trying *not* to feel composed.

“Yoi, I have—an’ left nowt eawt, noather,” Pothook replied. “I polished it off like a hungry dog would a lump o’ tripe.”

“You shouldn’t have done that; I shall get myself into a scrape through it. What did you tell for?”

“For t’ *do* as I’d be *done* by. I like fair-ation, an’ I’m sure it wurno’ fair to be cooartin’ two at oncet. I need not tell thee that. Adelaide’s too pratty a fleawer to be treddden on wi’ anybody’s foout, an’ Dick likes her so as he likes nowt else—poor lad! He’s gone whoam wi’ a weight-stone in his crop heavy enough to dreawn a bullock, an’ he sed he’d two minds for t’ mak’ a hole i’ th’ fust wayter he coom nee. But yon’s owd Charley comin’ sheawtin’ up th’ street, I yer.; an’ he’ll be sarvin’ a’ my customers if I stop any longer. So, good neet, owd wench, if I dunno co agen! Keep thy pecker up, for I reckon it’s a tryin’ time, th’ week or two afore weddin’. If I do owt upo’ th’ Darby, I’ll buy th’ a fippunce-a-yard weddin’ dress, an’ we’n mak’ Tammasses-

street * wonder what's cummin some fine day. 'Ta-ta-a!'" Saying which, our friend took up his basket and can, and made for the door.

"Good night!" said Fan, softly, and with as much sentiment in her face as would have supplied a whole chapter of love-making.

"Just keep it i' thy mind," entreated the other, as a sort of parting remembrance, "ut I won thee i' fair powell—one toss an' no barney. In another month I expect theaw'll be kessunt (christened) o'er agen; an' we'n have sich a flare-up i' this smithy ut ther hasno' bin sin' it wur built. Wouldt' like another squeeze? Well, never mind; good neet, wench!" and directly the amorous fellow was heard singing from the other end of the passage—

"Fresh tripe an' trotters! ribs o' beef an' legs o' mutton for a penny! Paes all hot! Here we are agen—a travelling cook-shop—hie yo' wimmen, hie yo' wimmen!"

* *Thomas' Street*, Manchester, is a noted resort for the lowest class of betting people.

CHAPTER II.

A FAINT flickering light shone out of one of the windows at the Grange, as Dick Robinson, carrying Alfred Herbert on his back, entered the gates. Dick was impressed with a feeling of awe as he looked round upon the quiet scene, to which the increasing gloom lent an unreal aspect. The statues, from the dim light through which they were beheld, looked weird-like, and seemed to start from their pedestals, and assume shapes and expressions that took the complexion of the hour, and frowned more darkly where the shade was deepest. And how melancholy were the trees and patches of shrubbery that rose on each hand. The bending alders, that made scant alcoves where they grew, bowed their tops to the passing night wind, and gave out at intervals low moaning music like the faintest notes

of a requiem. The windows of the house, with the one exception named, were dark, cold, and cheerless, as if light had never been permitted to shine through them, but were kept sealed for some purpose associated with the mysteries that were supposed to be attached to the mansion.

Notwithstanding the fatigue he felt, Dick could not help giving way to these impressions; and when he set his foot upon the door-step, the sound of the tread echoed through the building.

“Allow me to ring the bell,” said Alfred; “I can find the handle better than you,” and the young man gave a violent pull, which awoke the echoes again to Dick’s imagination.

“They’re a long time in coming. I hope my father’s no worse. Oh, I hear some one at last.”

A light step approached the door from the interior, and as the bolt was drawn a whisper from the servant attending bade them “come in.”

But what new calamity had fallen upon the house, the servant wondered, gazing with looks of astonishment at the strange spectacle before her.

She was an elderly and favourite domestic, on terms of familiarity with the mistress, to whom she was devotedly attached, and was concerned about everything that affected the fortunes of the family.

“Mister Alfred,” she exclaimed, holding the light to his face, “whatever’s the matter?”

“Only a slight accident,” was the reply. “Don’t alarm mother, but allow this young man to carry me to bed before he sets down. My leg is hurt. It may be better in the morning. Get me some hot water, Betsy, as soon as you can.”

“Oh, Mister Alfred,” said Betsy, giving an unintelligible shake of the head, “what do you think?”

“Father worse?”

“No; he’s come to himself again.”

“How?”

“His reason’s returned. Talks quite sensibly now.”

“You don’t say so.”

“But I do, Mister Alfred. He’s quite recovered.”

“I’m glad of that, Betsy ; but let me relieve my friend of his load, and we’ll talk of it afterwards. Show us to my room.”

The servant tripped lightly along the hall to show the way, and Dick commenced his difficult and toilsome ascent of the stairs, at the same time assuring his charge that he did not feel half so tired as he really was.

“Mister Alfred,” whispered the domestic, as she noiselessly opened the bed-room door, “we’ve a stranger visiting.”

“Indeed !”

“Yes ; he’s in the room now with your father.”

“And where’s mother ?”

“She’s below ; they wished to be alone.”

The servant retired, and Dick placed his burden upon a chair—so gently that the latter

felt but little pain during the process of removing.

The task of undressing was now commenced—a difficult undertaking ; but Dick performed it with so much satisfaction to the invalid, that he received many thanks for his kind offices. With a slight effort on Alfred's part, and the assistance of his trusty valet, he managed at length to get upon the bed, and the young man sank down upon his pillow like one who neither hoped nor wished to rise from it again.

“ There, the worst is over for to-night,” he said, with a look, that was gradually losing its hard and painful expression, and softening down into one of composure ; “ and if all were well to *this*, I should feel happy. Were you ever laid up with sickness or anything ? ”

“ Never, ut I con recollect,” Dick replied. “ Eawr folk sen I'd th' creease (measles) oncet, but it wur afore I knew mich of owt ; so I conno remember nowt abeawt it.”

“ I had fever when I was a little boy,” said the other, a sweet expression flitting over

his face as the reminiscence was called up, “and I can at this moment see everything that took place as distinctly as if it had occurred only yesterday. When I was considered to be at the worst I had no pain whatever; and I had such sweet companions came to see me! their faces were always crowding round my bed; and they came and went like a dream. Sometimes they would be fluttering about the ceiling or peeping from behind the curtains, playing at hide-and-go-seek. Then they would dance little fairy rounds, till one by one they would vanish, and I would look up and see my mother’s face—my *own* mother’s—bending over me. They told me afterwards I was delirious; I might be, but I was never happier. I am afraid that if I had fever now I should not see *those* faces again. I was innocent then, and those visions took the form of my purest thoughts and aspirations. They would be demons now—black as the spot upon my conscience;” and the face of the invalid changed its expression to that of the deepest gloom.

“ Oh me, Robinson ! I wish I was like you ! ”

“ Yo’n no ’casion,” said Dick, “ for I’m abeawt as miserable just neaw as a hawve dreawnt kittlin’.”

“ Don’t let this accident make you uneasy,” entreated Alfred ; “ it was of my own provoking, and I shall be better sometime. Comfort Adelaide as much as you can ; for I believe you love her.”

Dick was silent, but his looks confessed all that the other surmised.

“ She’s an angel, if ever there was one on earth,” Alfred continued, “ and she can make a heaven for you yet.”

“ *Never !* ” Dick exclaimed. “ Ther’s another hoo likes better nor me, or a’ th’ woald beside ; an’ if hoo conno’ have him, hoo’ll dee same as hoo is ; that I feel sure *on.*”

Alfred gave a deep sigh. It was evident he knew to whom the other was referring, and his thoughts seemed to be wandering back to happier days.

“But I cannot see why you should not be happy,” he observed; “a young man, with such prospects before him as you have; nor why you should not be loved by one whose most prominent quality is her gentle disposition. She would talk for ever of your kindness towards her, and if that is not a symptom of affection, it betokens the deepest gratitude.”

Dick was moved at this touching allusion to his generosity, but forbore to give verbal expression to his feelings.

“What would not I give to be in your place?” Alfred continued, “inexperienced in vice, fresh in the world, with every chance of obtaining the highest degree of happiness.”

“Ther’s nob’dy weel off beawt they think-en they are,” Dick observed.

“Do you think not?”

“Just so. Every mon is to hissle what he thinks he is to others. If he thinks he’s poor, he is poor: an’ if he thinks he’s rich, he is rich; I’ve yerd my feyther say so mony a time, an’ I believe him.”

“There is some truth in the observation, I must admit,” said Alfred, smiling.

“Neaw,” Dick continued, “look at owd Saul.”

“Saul! That was my grandfather’s name,” the other broke in, with reviving interest.

“Ah, well, it may be; but this Saul ut I meean is th’ skoomesthur at th’ little skoo i’th’ Hollow. He’s gotten it int’ his yed ut he’s a king; an’ just neaw he thinks he’s as big a mon as ever wur creawnt. Well, isnor he so—to hisselt? An’ what does it matter to other folk? I think I’m a yorney, an’ a bit o’ summut beside; so I am a yorney, an’ a’ ut anybody could say different would no mak me believe I’re intended for owt better.”

At this juncture the servant entered the room, bringing in a pail of hot water with which to foment the sufferer’s fractured limb, and keep down the swelling that had set in.

Dick at once laid aside his philosophy and his jacket; and guided by Alfred’s directions,

applied himself tenderly and assiduously to his novel task.

“I can sleep now,” said Alfred, after the necessary fomentation was completed. “My leg is much easier. Fold the clothes lightly over me, and then I’ll wish you good night.”

Dick did as he was requested to do, and before he could conveniently leave the room his patient had apparently closed his eyes in sleep.

CHAPTER III.

ABOUT fifteen years ago, in an old thatched tenement that had once been abandoned to rats and decay, "King Saul," then a stranger in Irkdale, set up his little school. It was a strange whim, thought the neighbours, that led the poor old man to select such a building for the purpose; but he was singular in all he did, notwithstanding the great amount of learning he was reputed to possess; and that most unaccountable hallucination, which led him to believe he was a dethroned monarch, kicked out of his kingdom by an ungrateful and disloyal people, gave a touch of romance to his character that caused him to be venerated by the simple villagers.

When seated at his desk, which had been made out of an old door, supported on legs that Jacob Robinson had furnished, Saul had

a picturesque and even imposing appearance ; and were it not from certain formalities that he had introduced into his school discipline, no one would then have suspected him of the least eccentricity. His conversation, when directed to things apart from his former life, was sound and lucid, and oftentimes entertaining. He was well informed in history, both ancient and modern, was profound in mathematics, skilful in accounts, and in penmanship few could equal him. He undertook the " letter-writing " for most of the old people in Irkdale, whose education extended no further than what was necessary for the reckoning up of a " shop-score," or the entries on a " loom-ticket." His memory was consequently the repository of such family secrets as perhaps were not known to more than a hundred people ; and as his clients seldom troubled him, their correspondence about keeping pace with marriages and deaths, it may be supposed that Saul had no great store to lock up in his confidence.

The school-house stood a few yards from

the river, and was entered by a narrow door, beyond which three or four steps of difficult descent, from their worn and broken condition, led into a low but spacious apartment, whose blackened and shining walls in some degree denoted the purpose for which it was used. In the middle of the room stood a double-leaved desk, which not only served to write upon, but was sometimes used for gymnastic exercises by the elder boys. The leaves of this desk were carved over with rude hieroglyphics, and the legs were roughly notched by the constant kicking of ironed clogs. From its general construction and stubborn, unwieldy appearance, this huge piece of furniture had acquired the appellation of "th' owd elephant," a name which the schoolmaster himself had got into the habit of calling it. Forms that defied friction of all kinds, and upon whose surface no impression could be made by the quality of cutlery that found its way into the school, squatted here and there as suited the caprice of those who sat upon them. These had been made out of posts of old fustian

looms, the rails being used for legs, which had taxed the skill and patience of Jacob Robinson to construct. The "spear," a partition which screened the fireplace from the door, was appropriated to the school library, and was shelved from the top to the height of a chair back. Upon these shelves was the most ragged array of books ever collected together. Primers that were anything but prim; Spelling-books whose leaves had to be shuffled like a pack of cards before they could be used; Testaments in which the Evangelists mingled indiscriminately amongst the Apostles; and Arithmetics that from the numerical table to the Rule of Three were black as the hands that used them, but which presented comparatively clean margins beyond, were massed higgledy-piggledy together. Here a slate, whose frame was held in its place by tin and tacks, displayed an unsolvable mathematical problem, to which arms and legs of attenuated thinness were attached; and there old copy-books, besmeared with ink, tallow, and treacle, were rolled or heaped in inextricable confusion.

Maps, to which generations of flies had contributed their improvements ; and a genealogical tree, that had lost a portion of the "Tribe of Manasseh," hung beneath the lowest shelf ; whilst a birch rod, worn to the handle, a small tinker's soldering-iron, and a hand-brush that ought to have been gray long ago, were suspended in convenient readiness from the chimney jamb. The corner here formed was dimly lighted by a small window punctured in the gable, beneath which the "dominie's" chair and desk were immoveable fixtures.

It was Friday afternoon, and Saul was doing his utmost to curb the jubilance of his "subjects," which gradually became more ungovernable as Saturday's holiday approached, when a strange visitor announced himself at the door. Several of the boys recognized in this personage the gardener at the Grange ; and, as they had more or less been guilty of sundry depredations in the immediate grounds, consequent apprehensions filled their minds.

"Yo're Mesthur Saul, are no' yo'?" said the visitor, looking round the "spear."

“Saul is my name,” the schoolmaster replied.

“Well, I come fro’ th’ Grange. Mesthur Herbert’s sent me, an’ he wants yo’ to go deawn to-morn a seein’ him.”

“Mr Herbert!” said the schoolmaster, with some surprise expressed in his manner.

“Ay, he’s my mesthur,” the other replied. “He’s a bit betther nor what he wur, and he says he should liket to see yo’. It’ll be to yor advantage, too, he says.”

“Why, what on earth can he want to see me for? I don’t know Mr Herbert,—never saw him in my life.”

“Well, I conno’ say; he never tells me nowt o’ that sort.”

“Are you sure I am the person he means?”

“Ther’s nob’dy else coed Saul abeawt here, is ther?”

“Not that I’m aware of.”

“Well, yo’re th’ ticket, then.” And the messenger turned carelessly upon his heel.

The juveniles hearing nothing about broken

rails, or damaged hedges, began to feel more at ease, and the usual hubbub of school life was fast setting in.

“ You can tell your master I’ll come down, as he requests,” shouted Saul above the uproar. “ Silence, you rebels ! ”—and he struck the desk with the soldering-iron, and put his hand towards the birch ; at which summons a few “ stops ” of the discordant music were silenced.

“ Very well,” said the gardener ; and he stumbled up the steps, and took his departure without awaiting further communication.

The schoolmaster, thus left to his reflections, began to form strange conjectures as to the purport of the interview sought ; but as two of his “ subjects ” were pulling each other’s hair, and another was using his clogs in a manner prohibited by the rules of the establishment, further surmise was checked, and he dismissed the matter from his mind for the time, and began to prepare for the last lesson of the week. This consisted of a series of questions upon natural history and the

structure of the earth; the answers given generally being as far wide of the mark as can be imagined; and how the patience of the self-styled potentate could survive the ordeal to which it was constantly subjected was not a little surprising.

The last question, which had reference to the formation of coal, having been submitted, and an answer given to the effect that it was the production of "Black Sam" and "Copper Nob," two noted colliers, the school was dismissed, and Saul began to collect together the litter of books which covered the desk and forms. Those of the boys who had made out a *casus belli* from disputes in the school, settled their differences by an appeal to clogs as soon as the threshold was crossed, whilst the peaceably-disposed took their way home. In a few minutes quietude was restored; the tick of the little blackamoor clock was heard for the first time since the assembling of the school; books were placed upon the shelves, and in the melancholy stillness which succeeds the immediate absence of jubilant voices,

the schoolmaster sat himself down to reflect upon the import of his invitation to the Grange.

On the following day, after giving the usual weekly "siding" to his school-place, Saul prepared himself for his journey. The old man was in no trouble about the choice of clothes to appear in, as he had not changed his outward attire since his first appearance in Irkdale. For fifteen years he had worn the same hat and coat, and the same velveteen smalls—long since napless, and now shining like garments made of oil-cloth—gradually sank over his calves as age bent him down, until they had attained the appearance of very short trousers. With the stick that always accompanied him over short distances as well as long, our eccentric friend set out from his school home; made a call at the "Jolly Jumper" for a "toothful" of tobacco and a "tot" of ale, and was in a few minutes passing the gate leading to the "Odd House." Wishing a "good afternoon" to such of the family as might be within hearing, he con-

tinued his walk down the valley,—a pleasant walk that fine summer's evening, and the schoolmaster loved a stroll at such a time and among such scenes.

“What can Mr Herbert want with me, I wonder,” he soliloquized, as the Grange came in sight. “I don't know him; never knew any one of that name, nor of his profession. Gambler, bankrupt, rascal, they say he is. Not a very desirable acquaintance, certainly. But the visit will be to my advantage, the man said. I can't see yet how that can be. Suppose he wants to poison me. I won't drink any of his wine; so I will avoid that. Yet, why should he want to poison me? I've done him no wrong; never did a man an injury in my life, not to my knowledge. But the world's full of wicked people, and I must be on my guard. Luckily it isn't a school day, or I couldn't have gone. But that might have been luckier still, if harm comes of this visit. I'll go on—I'll go on for all that. A bright afternoon like this ought to assure us against evil.”

The schoolmaster paused several times in his journey as the graver probabilities presented themselves to his mind and awoke his apprehension ; and when he reached Mr Herbert's mansion, and stood upon the hall steps, he was some time hesitating whether to proceed further.

“What if he means mischief?” he muttered to himself with his hand upon the bell-pull ; “madman that he is. But didn't the man say he was better? I'll risk it, at all events ;” and he rang the bell.

“Saul, the schoolmaster,” said the old man as a servant made her appearance in answer to the summons.

The announcement was forwarded to Mr Herbert, and presently the servant reappeared with the request that the visitor would step up-stairs.

The request was complied with, and the schoolmaster was formally ushered into the apartment which the invalid had not left since the first attack of the malady from which he was suffering.

The room was darkened by thick curtains which folded over the windows ; and from the walls old portraits frowned, and the furniture looked grim and funereal.

Mr Herbert was seated in a low stuffed chair that almost hid his person from view ; but he started on beholding the visitor, and his hands shook violently as he rose to receive him.

“ How do you do, friend ? Excuse shaking hands—mere ceremony. Take a chair, if you please. Sit down—sit down. Fine day, this—I believe ! ” And Mr Herbert dropped in his seat in a confused manner.

“ Take no notice of me,” he continued, as soon as he was seated,—“ I’m nervous—very nervous, you see—alarmed at the least noise—yes, yes. You don’t know why I sent for you.”

“ No,” the schoolmaster replied.

“ Not likely—not likely. You don’t know me, I suppose. I know you, and you used to know me. But I am altered, they say—very much.”

“I don’t remember your name,” observed Saul, as soon as the other paused, “nor your person can I call to mind.”

“Not know my name? Don’t at all wonder. Names change sometimes, as well as appearances. You knew me once, that is certain,” and Mr Herbert again sank back in his chair.

“But,” he continued, in a voice that faltered with emotion, “it isn’t of Charles Herbert that I desired to speak. Did you know one Charles Irving?”

King Saul started on hearing the latter name; his face became pale, and his whole frame shook with emotion. His eyes seemed to recoil as if from some horrid thing suddenly presented to his vision; and the death-like gasp with which he caught up and repeated the question, showed that some terrible meaning was connected with it.

“Do I know Charles Irving?” Saul repeated in a louder and firmer tone on partially recovering from his surprise,—“the murderer of my daughter!”

“Not the *murderer*,” interrupted Mr Herbert,—“say the *husband*.”

“The murderer,” Saul repeated vehemently, “the plunderer of my property; he who made a beggar of me, and turned me adrift to starve. Ah, I see it all now. I’ve been dreaming—I’ve been dreaming. Did not my child die—broken-hearted—through his cruelty?”

“No; she still *lives*.”

“*Lives*—does she? Impossible!”

“Not impossible. The certificate of her death I know to have been a forgery. She was driven from her husband’s home, and sought refuge from cruelty and desertion in a French convent.”

“You are not trifling with my feelings? I’m a poor old man, and cannot bear much. Tell me—where is my daughter now?”

“Promise me that for one week you will forbear to inquire further, and she shall be restored to you.”

“Oh, but how can I wait so long?—my

child — that I loved you know not how dearly ! ”

“ It is a necessary condition, and a week will soon pass over. ”

“ And this wretch — this Irving — where is he ? ”

“ Dead ! ”

“ Dead, did you say ? ”

“ Dead to all the purposes of life, ” said Mr Herbert solemnly, and after a violent inward struggle ; “ a bankrupt, hopelessly stricken down ; whose reason comes only like faint gleams of sunshine, and leaves the darkness of death behind it. He may soon be numbered with the things that have been, and prays for the hour to come. ”

“ But where — where is he ? ”

“ What remains of that wretch now stands before you ; ” and Mr Herbert made an effort to rise, but only shrank farther back in his chair.

“ King Saul ” started not upon hearing this announcement. Something there was that told him of its forthcoming, and he sat like a

statue with his eyes fixed upon his son-in-law, as though he had suddenly been deprived of the power to move or speak.

“Charles, Charles!” he exclaimed at length, “is this a dream?”

“It is a dream,” gasped the other; “and terrible will be the awakening from it. Oh, father! if I could have one word of assurance that you could forgive; how would it lighten the few days that God may apportion me to live!”

The wretched man dropped his head upon his breast, raised his hands to his eyes as if to shut out some object that would intrude itself upon his sight, and uttered a low moan that seemed to be the involuntary outpourings of an overburdened heart.

“And you have sent for me to tell me this,” said the schoolmaster, breaking a painful silence. “How knew you where I lived, or that I was living at all?”

“I saw you months ago, and have avoided you since,” replied the other. “I felt at the time that seeing you took me the first step

towards the end, showed me the first glimpse of the terrible fate that was awaiting me. Why don't you curse me?"

"Joy never comes without mercy," said the schoolmaster, "and the joy I feel that my daughter lives brings with it forgiveness of the past. Charles, I forgive you all!"

"That is the first angel's voice I have listened to since childhood!" exclaimed Mr Herbert, whom we will now call by his real name, Charles Irving, and he clasped his hands as if in prayer, whilst his face assumed a calmer expression. "I thought," he continued, "the world contained no ministers but demons, for they have so crowded in my path as to make hell of wherever I went. God has heard my prayers—sent me a minister of mercy in you, and were it not for one dark cloud—yonder, yonder—I could cover it with my hand sometimes, for it grows less as I pray—were it not for that I might see the sun shine again."

A paroxysm of grief followed these wild sentences, and nothing was spoken on either

side for some time. When Mr Irving had somewhat recovered himself, and had intimated that the imaginary cloud was passing away, he expressed a wish to speak further upon the purpose of the interview.

“You are aware, no doubt, of the misfortunes that have overtaken me,” he said, “that ruin—absolute and irretrievable ruin is now my lot.”

“I could not,” said the other, “be ignorant of that which is the talk of all Irkdale.”

“But no one knows the extent to which I am involved except myself and God. There are things that have yet to fill the public mouth they little dream of. All—all will come out in time; and they will speak of me as a gambler—bankrupt—bigamist, and—but I shall be gone—gone far away; and my ears will not be smote with the curses that will be sure to follow, nor will my eyes behold the mockings the unpitying would assail me with. One request I have to make of you, which, if complied with, will relieve

me of one of the many anxieties that oppress me."

"What may that concern?"

"My son—your grandson—Alfred. Be guardian over him when I am—gone. See that he keeps the right path, that he may be an honour where I have been a shame."

"It shall be my pleasure and duty, Charles."

"Soon his mother will be restored to him. She is informed already of the step I am about to take; and you will be happy—happy, whilst I, like a thief, hide from the pursuit of vengeance."

"But are there no means of redemption?"

"None whatever; redemption is impossible. All that I could desire further is that you breathe nothing that I have told you to living ears till I am gone."

"Not a word shall escape me; that you may rest assured of," and Saul rose to go.

"It is my wish that you remain here for the night," said Mr Irving, seeing the old man was preparing to depart. "It will be

some relief to know that you are near. The servant has received instructions respecting your accommodation, so you need not leave me yet."

The schoolmaster resumed his seat upon being further pressed to stay ; and the two exchanged confidences, and formed plans for the future, until the hall clock announced the hour of midnight.

CHAPTER IV.

JACOB ROBINSON felt that the extra pint with which he had indulged himself over the "inquest" had played the very deuce with his legs. He could not get over the ground so quickly as he wished, and as the exigencies of his domestic affairs were supposed to necessitate. The road was never worse to travel, although the night was far from being dark. Somehow the pavement had got into a wretched state of unevenness. The stones appeared to have risen out of their places, and the ruts were deep and ugly. To Nanny it seemed that her spouse had a decided inclination to throw himself into the ditch on his left, he having made several plunges in that direction, which, fortunately, she had strength sufficient to check.

“If I waut* my cart i’ theare, Nan,” he observed, after nearly realizing his apparent intentions; “I’se want a strunger tit nor thee fort’ poo’ me eawt; whorr, owd wench?” and he sang—

“Of a’ the airts the wind can blaw, &c.”

“Theaw’s forgotten, I think, what I’ve fotcht thee for,” returned the dame, “for theaw doesno’ favver bein’ mich concerned abeawt it.”

“Eh, whorr—Nanny! Forgotten what?”—and again he sang—

“Oh, what did the miller say to the maid?

With his clickerty-clack,

His hopper and sack;

A handful from this and a handful from that—

Oh, what did the miller say to the maid?”

“Theaw crazy-pate,” said Nanny, in a tone of strong reproof, “theaw’d sing at a buryin’, I believe. Theaw’s forgotten ther’s that young felly at eawr heawse.”

“I’ll punce him off at th’ knees,” muttered Jacob, making another plunge towards

* *Waut* is a term used by carters, and signifies falling on one side.

the ditch. "He munna stale yon bit o' th' fleawer eawt o' my garden; nawe, nawe. I'll ratch his ears till he may hang hissel in 'em th' fust."

"Theaw'll do neawt o' th' sort, Jacob," urged Nanny; "th' lad's weel-behaved, an' talks like a gentleman."

"Well, we'll see if he can feight like a gentleman," said Jacob. "It's a good while sin' my clog noses smelt fustian; but they'st have a snuft ut oather that or summut else, if a' isno' upo' th' level. Howd up, Nanny! Steady, wench! I'm gooin' neaw like a cowl. Is nor that eawr heawse i'th' front *on* us? To be sure it is. Look heaw it stonds theree like Jericho i'th' pictur, an' th' Palace o' Content ut Addy's done wi' th' needle. Talk abeawt *that* bein' made int' a dog-kennel! I'd blow it up till every breck wur brokken as fine as saw-dust th' fust."

"Theaw'rt ramblin' like an owd foo'," said Nanny, upon whom Jacob's similes were lost. "Theaw's bin havin' an extra dip i'th' pot, I think, by thy crazy talk."

“Nobbut a pint extry, Nanny; nobbut a pint,” Jacob protested; “but owd Johnny’s begun o’ puttin’ moore mawt in it than he used to do, and my legs are gettin’ waker. Hallo! Here we are, owd crayther; poo up, an’ fling th’ reins o’er th’ cart yed.”

The pair had now arrived at their garden gate, which Jacob made several attempts to open, much to the displeasure of his impatient companion.

“Where’s th’ latch, Nanny; has someb’dy stown it, I wondher?” said the former, fumbling in an insane manner about the gatestead.

“Theaw’ll noa find it wi’ rootin’ i’th’ *hedge*, I con tell thee,” replied the dame, testily. “Here’s cawr Addy comin’. Is th’ wench by hersel, I wondher?”

“Th’ tother brid’s happen flown,” Jacob surmised, as he flung open the gate.

Adelaide had not left the door from parting with her lover, but had stood there watching the shades of night gather over the land-

scape, and brooding pensively upon the incidents of the past hour.

“What, Addy, chilt, art theaw by thysel?” asked the old woman, as the girl approached.

“Yes, grandmother,” replied Adelaide, mournfully.

“An wheer’s that young felly?” demanded Jacob, not a little disappointed at the girl’s reply.

“Gone,” said Adelaide, sobbing deeply.

“What afore I’ve disturbed his ear wax?” Jacob observed, banging to the gate. “Well, never mind; young folk will be young folk, I reckon. They awlus wur yet, an th’ woald’s owder nor me.”

The party had now entered the house, which the keen eyes of Nanny Robinson soon discovered was not so straight and tidy as when she left it to go to the “Jolly Jumper.” Her rocking-chair was not in its own corner; the sand on the floor bore marks of recent scuffling, and the fender was soiled and pushed out of its place. Her good man, too, had made discoveries of an alarming nature, for on

stooping to take up his pipe, which was usually placed against the chimney-piece, he found that instrument to be broken in several fragments, one of which lay in a "leach" of blood.

"What's this?" he exclaimed, pushing the fender aside, and stooping still lower; "blood—blood! Ay, by owd Harry! Adelaide, what's bin up?"

The girl stood trembling in the shadow of the door, and though she essayed to speak, she could only answer with tears.

"Addy, chilt," exclaimed the old woman, whose fears whenever excited usually made mountains of molehills, "ther's noa bin som-b'dy kilt; has ther?"

"No, grandmother," sobbed Adelaide, coming forward and throwing herself upon the old woman's neck. "Dick will tell you all about it when he comes home."

"What—has th' divulment bin whoam oncet?" Jacob inquired in a sharp tone.

"He has," the girl reluctantly admitted.

"Oh, I see it a' ncaw; ther's bin some

clog an' fist wark gooin' on ; that's abeawt th' length on't. 'Th' lad's comn whoam an' cacht th' tother mon i'th' heawse, an' they'd meet like flint an't steel, an' strike foyer in a jiffy. Is nor that it ? ”

Adelaide confessed by her silence that the joiner was near the truth.

“Eh dear me ! ” put in Nanny, by way of parenthesis.

“Come, I'm noane sich a knowmon but I con tell a Methody chapel fro a cock-pit,” Jacob observed, “an' ther's bin a fluster here, if blood an' fithers meean's owt. Did Dick strike fust blow ? ”

Adelaide shook her head, as if to imply “no.”

“Well, then, I expect he gan th' tother a reet-deawn good hommerin', an' charged him nowt for it. I wish I'd bin here to see fair play. I reckon it wur that young what-'is-name—Herbert, fro' th' Grange. Well, that's a pity after a' ; a nice young chap, but a bit forrud an' frisky. He'd be no match for eawr nompey. Dick 'ud double him up like

a two-foout, before he could say uncle Jack. Where are they neaw ? ”

Seeing the old man was determined upon knowing the result of the affray betwixt the two young men, Adelaide set to and recounted, as well as her feelings would permit, the incidents as they occurred. When the result became known to Jacob, he struck his knee with his fist and exclaimed—

“ It’s a case o’ monslowter any minit ! Bad job—bad job ! Nanny, we mun look to this, or else eawr Dick’ll be in a hobble. I wish his fist had bin a bit leether—that I do.”

“ Eh, whatever will be th’ upshot on it, Jacob ? ” exclaimed Nanny, in a state of great alarm.

“ ‘Th’ upshot ’ll be this,” replied the husband, “ eawr Dick’ll ha’ to goo i’th’ *hole*, if we donno mind, an’ sarve him reet, too. Ther’s a difference between knockin’ the bark off a chap’s legs an’ breakin’ ’em. If he hasno’ learnt heaw to fight fair, theyn taich him, that’ll be a’. But we’n see what he says

when he comes back. Happen it's noa so bad as wur thowt."

"It happen may be wurr," suggested Nanny.

"Ay, theaw'll have it as bad as it con be," said Jacob, "ther's no deawt o' that," and he roused up the fire, and sent a cheerful light about the house.

Thus disposing of his wife's fears, Jacob reached out a new pipe, whilst Adelaide set about restoring the hearth to its usual trim appearance. This was but the work of a few minutes, so that by the time the joiner had got the smoke curling fantastically over his head, the wonted quietude, if not the cheerfulness, of his homely fireside had returned.

CHAPTER V.

A DETACHED dwelling, having some pretensions to the fashionable, but which has nothing in its appearance that would entitle it to particular notice, displays its plastered and paintless front, as you enter Irkdale from the west. Once the meagrest skeleton of verandah screened the doorway of this habitation; the scantiest curtains folded over the windows, and the most assuming of book-covers, were supposed to set off the gaudiest of table-cloths in a very small parlour. A "rockery," composed principally of broken jars, oyster-shells, and paving-stones, stood in the centre of a strip of lawn in front, and formed the pedestal from which a plaster "Flora" unurned a profusion of flowers. Ribands of green bordered a very narrow

walk leading to the door, and a small zinc plate, attached to a sort of birdcage-looking gate, intimated that one "G. S. Lightoller" was the occupier of the premises. Why the house should have been called "Woodbine Cottage," it would be hard to tell, as not a sprig of that plant grew about it. But the name was a pretty one, and smacked of that class of retirement which to a city man of select tastes and stylish notions, had a few of the advantages supposed to be attached to aristocratic life.

George Septimus Lightoller was the model of a quiet, plodding warehouseman, precise and punctual in all matters of business, even to the filing of his daily lunch account, or the settlement of a fire-wood bill. His face was a very folio of double-entry, upon which time was slowly "ticking off" items as life's balance-sheet was being made out; and his hands, from constantly locking safes, desks, and cash-boxes, were a pair of "Chattwood's patents"—keeping ward over the nice conventionalities which appear to be the soul of

“respectable” society. His coat was without a wrinkle, his hat smooth and glossy, his boots, ever musical with an assuring creak, were always guiltless of mud, whilst a black cravat, supporting a shirt collar that was never known to hang its corners, gave him such an appearance of moral rectitude that the Bank of England might have trusted its keys to his keeping, without fear of an unlawful use being made of them.

Mr Lightoller usually spent three shillings per week in ’bus fares; always riding inside, and invariably carrying a silk umbrella, no matter how fine or promising the weather might be. He had an abhorrence of cabs, however, on account of their expensiveness and their consequent association with “fast” life; and the spendthrift practice of standing “glasses round” when in company was one of the fashionable indulgences that found no favour in his estimation. Few people were possessed of a larger number of regulation virtues than Mr Lightoller. He attended church from habit, though he never spoke of the sermon.

He was at home punctually at seven after business, unless the 'bus happened to be behind its time, when he would smoke his pipe, take his half-pint of beer with his supper, then go to bed. To him his wife was the model of women. She was never out of temper with his prosy disposition; could laugh at the sorriest attempt at wit, and spend money like a princess had she been permitted. But George Septimus was supposed to keep a tight hand upon his means, though he allowed his wife to be purser; exacting only an account of what sum was spent upon household wants, and leaving the balance in her possession until such time as he supposed his fortune would be made, when, as he had no family, he would retire from the desk, and seating himself down under "his own vine and fig tree," would pass the remainder of his days without a single care as to how the rest of the world might be wagging.

That blessed institution, the Saturday half-holiday, allowed Mr Lightoller to reach home by two p. m. on that day, where he expected

to find his usual chop and baked potatoes ready to be placed upon the table, in company with his half pint of beer, his weekly paper, and a fresh supply of tobacco. When he had finished his dinner, and dropped himself in his slippers and arm-chair, a more comfortable-looking mortal it would hardly have been possible to meet with. His face seemed to have settled its weekly account of care, and presented a clean folio for fresh entries and totals, which Time would again "tick off" as the ledger account with eternity ran on. The very points of hair that met each other upon his otherwise bald forehead, were suggestive of two files, from which an accumulation of dusty invoices had recently been removed; and the self-satisfied gasp which was apparently intended to compose his waistcoat and shirt-front, seemed to have the additional effect of driving the faintest idea of domestic difficulty from his presence.

Our new acquaintance had just masticated his chop, and was leisurely engaged picking his teeth preparatory to taking up the news-

paper, when a timid knock came to the front door.

“Only a beggar,” said Mrs Lightoller, surveying her newly unpapered curls in the looking-glass.

“Humph! they know it’s Saturday, I suppose;” and Mr Lightoller picked his teeth the more complacently. “Do you ever give them anything?”

“Only scraps of broken meat, and sometimes a crust,” replied the wife.

“Wouldn’t give them a mouthful. People should be more provident.”

“So say I, Georgy,—they ought; and so I tell Missis Herbert; but laws me!—she gives and gives, even now that they’re in difficulties, which I wonder how she can think of, seeing as other people may have to suffer.”

“I shouldn’t be sorry, Susan, to hear that you had cut acquaintance with that lot,” said Mr Lightoller, thrusting his hands into his pockets, as if afraid of something flying out of them. “It’s hardly the thing,

now that people say what they *do* say of them."

"Why, what do they say?"

"Say? Oh, a great deal. Quite shut up. No chance of opening doors again, neither."

"But Alfred's marriage will set everything to rights again."

"Will it, though? Not quite so certain of that. Besides, it may never take place."

"Oh, yes; everything is arranged, and it should come off next week."

"And does the young man know *what* he's going to marry?"

"To be sure he does. Miss Dashwood is very rich, they say, and would be a match for a lord."

"He'd have to be a poor lord, I should think."

"Why, Georgy?"

"She's not over virtuous, if all be true that people say of her."

"You don't say so!"

"No; I'm only telling you what other people say; but if there are any vouchers to

the statements, Mr Herbert himself is no stranger to the young lady."

"But is that reported, George?"

"Whispered only, Susan. To save the young lady's character, Mr Herbert proposed to marry her to his son; and the boy, ignorant of the former connection, consented. What if he gets to know all?"

Here the knock at the door was repeated louder than at first.

"A persistant beggar, that, Susan. You allow them to be bold with you. I'll go to the door myself," and Mr Lightoller appeared to assume a dozen-beadle presence by the manner in which he rose from his chair and proceeded to the door.

"What's all this knocking about?" he demanded, opening the door and confronting a shabbily dressed man who seemed to be groaning under the weight of a large parcel which he bore upon his shoulder.

"Parcel for Mr Lightoller," said the man, in a tone of great humility.

"Who from?"

“ Can’t say, sir.”

“ Is it heavy ?”

“ Very, sir.”

“ Bring it forward, then ;” and Mr Lightoller led the way up the lobby.

No sooner had the porter crossed the threshold than he tumbled the parcel on the floor, then took a whistle out of his waistcoat pocket, and blew a shrill blast upon it.

The Lightollers were startled by this unseemly and most unaccountable proceeding, and both demanded to know what was meant by it.

“ I hold an execution,” said the man, producing a paper of a most alarming appearance, “ against the goods and chattels belonging to George Septimus Lightoller, at the suit of the Golden Fleece Loan and Discount Society, and issued under a judgment of the Court of Record of the Salford Hundred on the —— day of May, &c.”

Mr Lightoller looked at his wife, who looked at the floor ; and presently two other

unwelcome visitors of the class known as bum-bailiffs darkened the lobby with their presence.

"How is this, Susan; what does it mean?" demanded Mr Lightoller, as soon as surprise would allow him to speak.

There was no answer; and the wife still kept her eyes on the floor.

Mr L. groaned; and his fist made several abortive attempts to look formidable.

"What is the amount claimed?" he inquired, turning to the foremost officer, who appeared to be calculating the value of a Loo table and a large horseshoe mirror.

"Sixteen—four—ten, including costs," the officer replied.

"Sixteen curses!" exclaimed Mr Lightoller, looking unutterable things at everybody. "Susan, I must know what all this means. What have you been doing? Do I owe the debt?"

"Yes, George," simpered Mrs L., after considerable hesitation and an abundance of tears.

“And if it is as I suspect, I’ve nothing to pay it with.”

“*Nothing.*”

“Nothing—nothing! Then go on, you fellows;—strip the house at once. Don’t leave as much as a starved thief would fetch away. Susan, Susan,—have I worked and striven all these years for this?”

“Hear me, George,—hear me,” entreated the penitent woman, seizing hold of the arm that she imagined was raised to strike her. “It is all my fault, I own; but hear me.

“Stop your plundering, you varment!” shouted Mr Lightoller, seeing that the gilt books which lay upon the table were being tumbled about like so much waste paper.

The bailiffs desisted, and awaited further instructions from their leader.

“Now, woman, what have you got to say?—what have you been doing?” and Mr Lightoller shook his wife from her hold upon him.

“It was all for you I did it,” said Mrs L., weeping bitterly.

“ All for me you did what ? ”

“ Borrowed the money.”

“ And why should you borrow money without my knowledge ? Had you none ? ”

“ No.”

“ Not any ? Where’s it all gone to, then ? ”

“ Spent.”

“ Spent—spent ? Good God ! do I hear right ? How have you spent it ? ”

“ Don’t strike me, George—don’t kill me, and I’ll tell you the truth. I’ve lost it in *betting*.” *

* This is not an overdrawn picture; several instances having come under the author’s notice of the wives of respectable working men becoming so infatuated with the betting mania, as to be the means of plunging their husbands in almost irretrievable difficulties. He has watched the career of one woman in particular, who commenced with investing small sums on racing events, encouraged sometimes by winning, and sometimes made desperate by losing, until, from the well-dressed and lady-like person distinguished from the rabble that frequented low betting haunts, she became one of the most degenerate-looking of her sex: and this at a time when her husband was earning good wages.

The author has no objection to horse-racing as a *pastime*. He rather admires the “good old English

“ Betting, Susan, betting?—Go on, you scoundrels; take everything in the house. Make a bon-fire of it, if you like. Ay, chairs and all. Tumble them through the window, and never let me see them again. Oh, you deceitful woman! Three hundred a-year—no family—and an execution in the house, when I hoped to have been saving a fortune! Susan, Susan, that we should have come to this! ”

“ I know it was wrong, George,” said the guilty woman; “ but I was persuaded to try *one* investment by Missis Spencer, who had won a large stake. I lost, and have tried ever since to win my money back, till

sport,” when conducted upon legitimate principles; but when it is made subservient to the interests of a class of people who take every advantage to fleece honest and well-meaning men and women, and bring ruin upon homes that ought to have been the happiest, he feels it is time to cry out against it. Wedding rings have been stripped from fingers; clothes carried weekly to the pawn-shop; loan offices drained to supply means for encouraging a system that is rapidly growing upon us, and which well-wishers to their fellow-creatures would do well to investigate.

it has come to what it has. But, George, you won't allow our home to be broken up. Have you no friends? Is there no one who would lend you the amount? Save me this time, and I promise you I'll bet no more, never, George, never."

"Mrs Lightoller threw her arms round her husband's neck as she uttered this appeal, and the effect was not lost upon that gentleman's yielding disposition.

"Here, you officer," he said, after a show of firmness that quite astonished himself, "just place the things as you found them, and I'll give you a cheque upon Cunliffe, Brooks, and Co. for the amount you claim. Sixteen four ten, you say."

"Yes," said the serving officer, and immediately the table was restored to its former position; the cloth was spread upon it, and the show books were arranged in their respective places.

"These things *is* very unpleasant, Mister Lightoller," said the spokesman bailiff; "but we are obliged to do our duty, you know.

Would rather give a receipt any time than distrain. Much pleasanter for all parties. Thank you !”

The latter expression was occasioned by Mr Lightoller’s producing the cheque, and presenting it to the officer, who scrawled a receipt for the amount, and closed the transaction.

“ Now, then, Mr Lightoller,” said the latter, very politely, “ is there anything I can do for you ?”

“ Yes,” said the other, with an expression of abhorrence in his looks and manner ; “ there is one little favour you can do me.”

“ What may it be, if you please ?”

“ Just turning your back towards me, and letting me kick you out of the house.”

“ Thank you, sir, thank you, much obliged ; but I’m not at all ambitious for such a rise in the world ; so good-bye !” and the three representatives of the majesty of law made a hasty retreat towards the door.

The house being fairly quit of its unwelcome visitors, Mr Lightoller betook himself to

his chair, and, summoning his spouse to his presence by an impressive pronunciation of her Christian name, prepared himself for a thorough investigation of his domestic affairs.

The couple had been married four years. Mr Lightoller was considerably older than his wife; so, as he inwardly expressed himself, it would not be unbecoming his place as husband were he to "talk to her like a father." He had suspected for some time that Mrs L.'s frequent journeys to Manchester were not on purpose to see her sister; nor to shop, even. He had now his suspicions confirmed by her own confession. He remembered once seeing her turning out of Oldham-street into Thomas-street, but would not "light on," for fear she might think he was watching her movements. Had he followed and knocked her down, it might have saved something. Now it was *too late*. He had but to see in what position he stood, and then make a fresh start.

"Have you no account of what you've—made away?" he demanded, seeing that his wife, who was leaning against the table, and

nervously endeavouring to fasten a bracelet, showed herself willing to go into details.

“I have all the sums down somewhere,” she replied, taking a key out of her pocket, and applying it to the lock of a small cabinet. “Here they are,” she said, and she took from the drawer a small memorandum book, and placed it tremblingly in her husband’s hand.

“Two — five — ten — twenty!” said Mr Lightoller, running hastily over the items in the book. “Good God, Susan, what a mess! I can’t do it,—I can’t do it. It would kill me to go over all this! Here, let bygones be bygones. There!”—and the exasperated man tore the book in a hundred pieces, and flung the fragments behind the fire.

Had Mr Lightoller made an end of the matter here, and settled himself down to a thorough reconciliation with his wife with the spirit of a man who had more than resolved to “to talk to her like a father,” all might have been well in time. But no sooner had he begun to reflect upon the position in which he found himself placed, than he flew into a vio-

lent rage, swore like a trooper, and as a *dénouement* to the scene, and in spite of Mrs L.'s entreaties, put on his boots and hat, and dashed out of the house.

That night our friend got drunk. It was the first time in his life that he had taken more than a strictly moderate quantity of beer ; but feeling himself so completely upset with what had taken place, and also feeling it impossible to allay the excitement he was under by philosophical means, he betook himself to the "Jolly Jumper," and calling for pint after pint, got himself so thoroughly soaked as to place the landlord under the necessity of taking him home in a wheelbarrow. That was the first step in a downward career. George Septimus Lightoller was no longer to be known as the steady-paced, sober-headed, striving man he had hitherto been. "Let us both pull one way," he said, "if it be the wrong one ;" and they *did* both pull one way, but it was the wrong one, and down they went to social perdition.

CHAPTER VI.

THREE days had passed over Irkdale—three exciting days, and the time was drawing near when the mystery which hung over the Grange would no longer be a source of anxiety to the neighbourhood. “King Saul” was as silent as the grave about what he had heard from Mr Irving, and was so overcome by the circumstances their interview had disclosed, that he would sit for hours at a time in his school-house, neglectful of his duties, and regardless of the tumult that was rife around him. He thought only of his long-lost child, of her unknown sufferings, and the happy meeting which he had been assured was in store for them. Tears would follow these reveries, and the more jubilant of those about him would cease their shouting, and contemplate with concern, if not with commiseration

the apparent sorrow of their master. The books lay about him in still more disordered heaps; the pen refused to trace those fine ornamental characters which had so won the admiration of his patrons on former occasions. Rule of Three or Multiplication equally taxed his powers of calculation, and Natural History was only the life of *one* being, in comparison with whom the whole animal kingdom was as nothing. The "Elephant" seemed to be groaning beneath an increasing amount of ill-treatment; the forms looked sullen and morose, and the soldering-iron had not once been taken down since the Friday before. "King Saul" was no longer "his Majesty;" the vision of deposed royalty had suddenly faded, and now he was simply the schoolmaster of Irkdale.

Gloom continued to gather round the Grange. Alfred Herbert, or Irving, as we must now call him, was suffering from other ailments than those which proceeded from his fractured limb. Fear, anxiety, remorse had so lacerated his nervous system that fever had

supervened, and was hourly increasing its ravages upon his constitution. The doctor was in frequent attendance upon the sufferer, and strove by all available remedies to check the growth of the malady, the symptoms of which were rapidly becoming alarming. The lady of the house ministered to his wants with most gentle care and assiduity. She could not have done more had she been his own parent. Flitting noiselessly about his bed; listening to his breathing, and to the faint articulations by which he made known his feelings and wishes—she seemed an angel in mortal guise. Then the good clergyman would come down, and speak so hopefully of love and salvation, and heavenly inheritance, that the youth would feel as though the dross of this world was fast leaving him, and he was emerging from a state of chrysalis, to assume the perfect life which cometh beyond the grave.

One evening he had watched with more than his wonted interest the sun sink into the west, for somehow he felt as though it would

not rise again ; not that he was dying, but that the world would be in darkness evermore ; and he would be translated to a sphere where the light never faded, and where love and joy and goodness knew no setting. Dick Robinson stood over him ; for the stalwart weaver had been unintermitting in his attentions to his rival ever since their unfortunate encounter ; and he refused to be convinced that he was noways answerable for the young man's sufferings. Alfred strove, however, to assure him there was no blame to be attached to his conduct ; that the disease sprang from other causes, for which his own past life must account, and that ere long it would rest with God alone whether his bruised soul should be for ever healed.

“ Richard,” he said faintly, and Dick stooped to listen, “ I should like to see some of my schoolfellows before I sleep to-night. Do you think they would come if I sent for them ? ”

“ To be sure they would,” Dick replied, “ or else they are no' wo'th seein'.”

“ You’re so kind, Richard, and have done so much for me, that I am afraid of asking you to do more.”

“ Dunno be feeart o’ axin’ me nowt ; say what theaw wants doin’, an’ I’ll do it if it is for t’ be done.”

“ Well, then, there are these school companions whom I wish to see. I will give you their names if you will go and request them to come down.”

“ I’d fly if I’d wings,” said Dick.

“ Well, there is Henry Lawton, Moses Roscoe, Walter Mills, Mary Taylor, Jane Whitehead, Ellen Schofield, and Ad——, he could not utter the last name, or he would have said *Adelaide Wilson*.

“ Those will do, Richard, those will do. You, perhaps, know where they live.”

“ Do I know th’ road whoam, dost think ? ”

“ Bid them for the sake of old school days to come and see me. Say how much I need their prayers, and that I may not need them long.”

Dick wondered what was the import of the latter sentence; surely Alfred was not dying! No, no; his cheeks were flushed, and he looked so like the youth whom Dick had seen with Adelaide Wilson in the school procession, that the latter thought his friend had more the appearance of joining a bridal party than taking up his abode amongst the shades of the departed. It was the reflection of sunlight upon the crimson bed curtains that wrought the apparent glow upon Alfred's face.

"Is there owt else theaw wants me to do afore I goo?" said Dick, putting on his cap.

"You may reach me that portrait," said Alfred, pointing to a morocco case which lay on the dressing table; "it will be company for me whilst you are absent."

The case was closed, so that Dick had not an opportunity of seeing whose likeness it contained; but as he handed it to his friend, and caught the admiring yet melancholy gaze which the latter directed to the portrait, he

could not rid himself of the impression that it belonged to his foster-sister.

“That will do—thank you, Richard,” and Alfred kissed the portrait fervently. “Now then, our friends.”

“A’ reet, an I’ll be off like a shot.”

With that Dick slipped out of the room almost imperceptibly, and was soon scouring Irkdale on his kindly errand.

The parson here entered the room with Mrs Herbert, and the intervening hour was spent in prayer, and over those tender offices which good clergymen know so well how to perform.

Mr Irving knew not of his son’s illness. The fact had been carefully kept from his knowledge, lest it should so affect his mind as to place him beyond hope of recovery. He had often inquired about Alfred, and was as often assured that he was as well as could be expected under the misfortunes which had fallen upon the family. That night he insisted upon seeing him, but was told by the servant that the youth was absent, and would not return home for some days. He appeared

depressed and disappointed at this intelligence, and he muttered something in gloomy accents, the purport of which did not reach the woman's ears. But she was struck with his manner, and thought much about it after leaving the room.

Meanwhile, Dick Robinson had executed his mission, and now announced himself at the door, attended by the young people whom he had been despatched to seek out. Noiselessly they ascended the stairs, as though they were treading upon the threshold of eternity ; sorrowfully and tearfully they cast their eyes on the altered face of their companion, and took his hand in theirs and returned its gentle but assuring pressure ; but more sorrowfully still they listened to the faint voice which bade them welcome to the last meeting they should have on earth,—the last school-service in which *one* of them could take part.

“ I am so glad you've come,” said the invalid, as he took hold of each hand in succession, “ I was afraid there was not such a joy in store for me, not *here*, not *here*.”

“Heaw dun yo’ feel yorsel?” inquired several voices.

“Better,—much better,” replied Alfred, smiling. “I’m improving so rapidly, that I feel I should be quite well in the morning.”

“But yor leg?”

“Oh, that isn’t of much consequence.”

“It’s bad; is it no’?”

“It will be healed before long. There are no broken limbs where I am going to,” and Alfred smiled again.

The visitors looked at each other with simultaneous glances, as if the truth of the situation had flashed upon each conviction at the same moment; and the shock it produced to the feelings of all present drew forth tears afresh.

“Stand round me, as I have seen you in my dreams,” said Alfred,—“and let me hear you sing. Don’t cry; I am happier than you think me. I shall soon be with little Sarah, and the sisters Rothwell—who left us last fall, and said they were going to Christ. Sing

‘The Dying Christian,’ and I will lead out the hymn,—

‘Vital spark of heavenly flame,
Quit, oh, quit this mortal frame;
Trembling, hoping, lingering, flying,—
Oh, the pain,—the bliss of dying!
Cease, fond nature, cease thy strife,
And let me languish into life.’ ”

There was a pause, during which nothing but sobs and other manifestations of sorrow were audible; then those of the more composed broke forth solemnly with the hymn; others followed one by one until the strain was taken up by the whole choir, and the music swelled and reverberated throughout the mansion.

The first six lines having been sung, the singers waited for the further giving out of the hymn, and stood in breathless silence during the pause. A minute had elapsed—two, and the pale lips moved not, nor did sound issue from them. “The *Dying Christian*” had now no meaning to the form which lay in all the stillness of marble on that bed of death. The soul had quit its “mortal frame”

for ever, to finish the hymn on the way to its eternal abode.

* * * *

Just before the requiem broke forth, a skulking figure might have been observed stealing away from the back premises of the Grange. It was that of a man wrapped in a loose riding cloak, and who was further disguised by a hat, which slouched down upon his face. He stayed not to look nor listen; but crept under cover of the hedges and trees that grew thickly about, and was soon traversing the open country. On he went over fence and meadow as swiftly as the darkness and the nature of the ground would permit. Now he forded the river and made towards a steep bank that tasked his strength to climb; then anon other meadows and fields spread themselves before him, over which he sped until the main road was gained.

The man now stopped to get his breath, and for the first time to look and listen in the direction he had come. All was still—save now and then when stirred a sleepless breath

of wind that would wanton among the leaves as if to disturb their rest, and the faint, low murmurs which came from the adjacent city. The Grange was no longer in view, and the woods about it were almost indistinct. The valley was only indicated by a dark misty void that wound itself snake-like into the distance; and the deepening of the night would soon obscure even these traces of where Irkdale reposed. Turning round with the feelings of one who sees no home—no world whence he had come, the fugitive pursued his way in the direction of Manchester, and ere again he paused the city lights were gleaming upon him.

* * * * *

Mrs Herbert knocked at the door of her husband's room on leaving the death-chamber, with the half-formed purpose of preparing him for what had happened. There was, however, no response to the knock; and she silently opened the door and looked around. No one appeared. Mr Herbert, she thought, must have lain down, and she timidly drew the bed-

curtains aside. She might have heard him breathing had he been there ; but not a sound came forth. The bed-clothes had not been disturbed, save by the wind which came through an open window. The window open, and Mr Herbert not there ? The truth suddenly flashed upon the lady's mind.—He was gone !

CHAPTER VII.

THE incidents related in the foregoing chapter caused great uneasiness among the family at the "Odd House." Upon Adelaide Wilson the news of Alfred's death fell like a cruel blow, notwithstanding the previous estrangement of the two young people; and though to Dick Robinson the event might seem to bring hope by having taken a rival out of his path, that simple-minded youth no less regretted such an event having taken place. He had "never told his love" to Adelaide; never sought opportunity to hint at the existence of such a passion, unless he inadvertently betrayed it by looks or actions. Indeed, he had so far set aside his own feelings as to pray for Alfred's recovery, if it was only that he might induce that apparently unfaithful youth to return to his first love, and

make Adelaide his wife. But to be the cause, as he himself supposed, of rendering such a thing impossible,—to have destroyed with his own hand the picture his imagination had created,—to feel himself half a murderer,—his victim waiting for the kindly earth to cover him,—was a source of mental agony to the young man that absorbed every other feeling.

It was useless that Dick sought his loom, as an antidote to the bane of reflection. He could not drive the image of the dead youth from his mind, do what he would ; nor shut out from his ears the tones of that sad requiem upon which the freed soul seemed to have winged its way to bliss. The shuttle had a melancholy and funereal sound with it. It might have been the pick-axe of the sexton rattling among the loose stones of a grave ; or the solemn tramp of mourners in the funeral train ; for he fancied he could hear those sounds as distinctly as if he had stood in the churchyard. In vain did the flowers dance at the window. The roses lent not their accus-

tomed smiles ; nor did the woodbine flutter its leaves like little banners of joy. To him they were more like the nodding of the hearse's plumes, or the presence of some deep token of the heart's bereavement.

Thus would our young friend sit upon the seat-board of his loom ; now and then resting his head upon his hand, and his elbow upon the "breast-beam,"—the morning as bright a one as ever came from heaven, but to him as gloomy as the mid-hour of night. He had not even the odd humour of old Jacob to rouse his spirits ; for that eccentric individual had left home early in the morning to purchase timber at a neighbouring village. Adelaide, too, was absent ; she having been sent for by the minister of Irkdale church for some purpose unknown to her foster-brother ; so that there was only himself and old Nanny at home, and the latter was as fretful as ever a poor sympathizing mortal could be. As a relief to his feelings, Dick at last resolved upon a visit to his friend Pothook ; so, with this purpose in his mind, he set back his fly,

stripped his apron, put on his hat and swinger, then informing his mother that he was going on an errand to Manchester, set out in the direction of that city,—whither we will leave him journeying.

Had not Dick left the “Hollow” at the moment he did, it is probable that a most amusing interview with his friend the tripe merchant would have been prevented by the occurrence of an incident which caused a considerable stir at the “Odd House.” The ass and cart, with their modest “jag” of timber, were within ear-shot of home, and old Jacob was in the act of coaxing his wayward animal out of a fit of stupidity, when he was surprised by the driver of a cab hailing from the rear.

“I say, Old Breeches, just you shunt yer express out o’ that while I get past; will yer, please?”

“I’ll *shunt* thee off thy peearch ift’ coes me Owd Breeches,” said Jacob, looking up at a good-humoured face that was twinkling beneath a level-brimmed hat.

“ Meant no chaff, Daddy,” returned the cabman, seeing that the joiner’s honest countenance was by no means in its brightest aspect. “ Just pull him round a little. There. All right ! Told you I’d take a wheel off ; ” and the cab, hustling Jacob’s humble conveyance so as to rouse the donkey out of its fit of stubbornness, dashed down the lane at a rattling pace.

“ Hi, Gaffer,” sung out the cab driver, reining up and looking back, “ can yer tell me where’s the Oddfellers’ ’All ? ”

“ Gullook ! ” returned the joiner, nettled at the seeming impertinence of the querist.

“ Well, the Odd House, then, crusty ! ”

Jacob, wondering what was the cabman’s business with his domicile, signalled him to pull up ; then, urging his own animal forward by a few impatient blows on the cart-shaft, soon drew along the more pretentious conveyance.

“ Well, what does theaw want wi’ me ? ” he said, taking a sly peep through the cab window.

"I want the Odd House," replied the other.

"Well, they coen my cote th' Odd Heawse," said Jacob, "tho' what for I never could tell."

"Driving a gentleman there," said the cabman, in a subdued tone. "Asleep, I des-say. Came by the night London train. How far have we to go?"

"Just lond him at that gate," said Jacob, pointing down the lane, "an' he'll nobbut ha' th' length o'th' fowt to goo. Come up, Ajax!"

"Ajax" made a reluctant effort to comply with his master's wishes, and the two vehicles finished their journey in company.

Arrived at the gate pointed out by the joiner, the cabman roused his "fare," who was some time before he appeared to recollect himself.

"Hollo!" said he, "where are we?"

"At the Odd House, Irkdale, where yer told me to drive," the cabman replied, touching his hat.

“Oh, yes,—beg your pardon,” and the gentleman alighted.

He was a dark man, with grey moustache and other frosty indications in the short hair which hardly cropped out from under his hat. He was elegantly dressed, and although apparently worn with travelling, there was a freshness in his looks that denoted sound living, and a well-preserved condition. He looked round hastily as he stepped out of the cab, and discovered an old man gazing intently at him from behind a very small load of timber; and as the features of this person were not utterly out of his recollection, the discovery evoked an expression from his lips that made Jacob start.

“Mr Robinson, don’t you know me?”

“Well, I think I owt to do,” said Jacob, coming from behind his breastwork, and looking scrutinizingly at the interrogator. “Yo are no’—yi, by my stockins, yo’ are! Mesthur Wilson, are no’ yo?”

“The same, old friend; how are you?”

“As hearty as a new sprungn hare, but

no' quite so nimble." And the two shook hands so warmly, that the cabman felt as if he was helping them.

"And how — how is — Adelaide?" Mr Wilson inquired; feeling considerable relief on seeing the picturesque smile which expanded itself over the joiner's countenance, as the question was put.

"As reet as a wooden clock, as far as yealth is concerned," replied Jacob, in a most assuring manner. "Yo'n see for yorsel e'en-neaw, I reckon."

"Is she at home?"

"Well, hoo wur when I seet eawt this mornin'. It's a wondher hoo hasno' flown here afore neaw. Come, let's goo i'th heawse an gloppen her."

"Stay a moment," said Mr Wilson, betraying considerable emotion as he spoke. "I've been trying all the way to imagine what she is like——"

"Like nowt else abeawt here," interrupted the joiner, with a jerk of his head that implied full confidence in what he was asserting.

“Hoo’s as pratty as a picthur, an’ made up as nicely as a suet dumplin’. Hoo hasno th’ length abeawt her ut some wenches han, but just a middlin’ bukth o’ limb, an’ as swipper as a new tipt shuttle hoo is. Yo’n say her porritch hasno’ been thrown away when yo’ seen her.”

“And that son of yours—how is he?”

“What eawr Dick? Oh, he’s reet enough, —that is, in his heavy timber wark; but I’m rayther disappoynted in his yed-piece. He’s gettin’ some of his nails drawn, or summut i’ that quarter; for it strikes me ther’s a joynt or two flown. But come i’ th heawse,” said Jacob, “an’ let that mihogany-faced whip-sucker be takkin’ his leather wheelbarrow eawt o’th’ road,”—an expression that elicited a good-natured wink from the florid cabman.

The traveller’s luggage having been handed down, and the cab fare having been receipted by the customary tip of the hat, Jacob Robinson led his friend up the garden “fowt,” whence old Nanny was seen ready to welcome them at the door.

“ God bless me, Jacob ! ” exclaimed the astonished dame, presenting the full broad-side of her spectacles to Mr Wilson, this is noane o’ eaur Addy’s feythur, is it ? ”

“ Theaw’s betther een nor me, owd wench,” replied the husband ; “ for I didno’ know him at th’ fust. He’s awthert abeawt as mich as onessel.”

“ Eh, well,—did I ever know owt like it ! Like as a thing ut must be ! ”

“ Bless you, how are you, mother ? ” said Mr Wilson, taking the old woman’s hand, and almost shaking her glasses from their resting-place.

“ Well, I’m meeterly, Mesthur, for an owd body,” said Nanny ; “ an’ yo are no’ lookin’ so bad. What a pity it is ut eawr Addy’s not i’th’ heawse ! ”

Mr Wilson’s countenance fell on hearing that his daughter was away from home, and a shade of disappointment passed over it. She would return, however, in due time ; but he felt it would be a year until then ; for mo-

ments had grown into weeks since he set out upon his journey.

“It seems only yesterday since I was here before,” he said, as the party entered the house. “The same snug, home-like place. Nothing changed in the least.”

“Eh, yi—we’n a’ on us changed,” observed Nanny, with a sermon on time in the shake of her head. “An’ there *are* sich changes neaw-a-days. Dear o’ me! Gie me yor hat, Mesthur Wilson, an’ I’ll brush it, and put it ont’ drawers. Yo’n be hungry, I da’say, an’ could do wi’ a bit o’ summut t’ ate.”

“Thank you, mother!” said Mr Wilson, “but I’m noways inclined for eating, just now. I’ll take a seat, if you please.”

“Eh, just so!” exclaimed the old woman, fidgetting about. “Whatever are we thinkin’ at, ut we ha’ no’ set yo’ a cheear. Jacob, theaw’d let th’ felly drop afore theaw’d ax him t’ sit deawn, if I did no’ mind thee: theaw’rt so thowtless. Sit yo’ deawn i’ my rockin’-cheear, an’ I’ll get yo’ summut t’ ate, as

soon as I con find it. Jacob, draw a sope o' drink eawt o' yon white bottle. I think it's that we'n bin havin' eawt on th' last."

"I emptied that yesterneet, Nan," said Jacob, accompanying the confession with a look of mock fear.

"The dickens theaw did; theaw drunken swill tub!" and Nanny shook her cap-screen reprovingly.

"Well, I did it fort' wesh bad thowts deawn," said the joiner, turning to Mr Wilson. "Yo' seen one gets a bit o' unyessiness upo' one's crop sometimes; an' a sope o' drink's th' best of owt for weshin it off. Yon lad o' cawrs has bin misbehavin' hissels, like a thowtless leather-yed as he is, an' brokken a young chap's leg wi' feightin—fair feightin, too, yo' mind—an' th' young chap's ta'en ill wi' a feyver, an' deed through it. Heaw Dick 'll goo on, I dunno' know; but I'm feeart ther'll be some bother abeawt it."

"How very unfortunate," Mr Wilson observed.

"Ay, one gets a bit o'th' *owd lad's* luck

sometimes, if we dun thry t' do th' best we con; but after a's sed, if everybody gets through th' woald wi' as little t' grumble at as me, they'n do."

"Was the young man a neighbour of yours?" Mr Wilson inquired.

"Ay, an' it wur thowt onct ut he intended bein' akin to yo'; an' it wur that ut caused eawr nompey for t' do as he did."

"How, I don't understand you?"

"Well, for t' tell yo' th' truth, he'd a bit ov a notion o' Adelaide;—yo' seen young folk *win* be young folk—an' I believe ut th' wench didno look at him wi' a feaw look; for they'rn t'gether as oft as they could shap it. I did a' ut I could fort' stop it afther I geet t' yer on't; an' eawr Dick stood by Adelaide like a stone wall, an' wouldno' see nowt wrung come to th' wench. Well, one neet Dick thowt this young chap had gan her some unyessiness abeawt summut, so he used his fist like a hommer, an' it's ended as I've towld yo'."

Mr Wilson had felt some misgivings that, in his absence, Adelaide might be forming a

connection with some of the youths of the village that would not be so eligible as he could desire ; and he felt relieved of these apprehensions by the statement the joiner had made, though he regretted the circumstances that had brought it about.

“ Was the young man of good family ? ” he inquired, curious to know how far his daughter’s choice was commendable.

“ Well, that’s just as folk thinkn,” replied Jacob, who had peculiar ideas as to what respectability consisted of. “ They’d *brass*, an’ livt in a fine heawse, if that’s what yo’ coen bein’ a good family. Wi’ some folk I reckon it doesno matter heaw *brass* comes, so ut they getten howd on’t ; for o’ someheaw if they’re th’ biggest waistrels i’t’h woald while they’re poor, as soon as its known they’n an owd stockin’ full o’ Californy, they getten sondpappert o’er wi’ folk’s tongues till they’re as smoot as a new bobbin. I dunno meean t’ say ut this lad’s feyther actily geet his brass wi’ takkin it eawt o’ other folk’s pockets, but what his fingers would ha’ done if God

O'Meety had laft one o'th' ten commandments eawt, I would no' liket' say."

"What business is this man engaged in?"

"Well, noane just at present. He's done up, dish an' spoon; or else he're what they coen a *leg*."

"What, a sporting character?"

"Just so, though he're noane partikelar to hoss racin'. He'd bet upo' a boat swim, or a pigeon fly, or a hen race. He're in at a' eends, but geet sowd wi' a hoss last Karsey Moor races, an' it caused him to slamper up like a doll ut's had a' th' sawdust letten eawt on't, an' neaw he's off ut a' sides."

This subject was a painful one to Mr Wilson, whose recollections of his former life were so strongly reminiscent of gaming, bankruptcy, and beggary, as to cause him to wince under the details of a history that had some affinity to his own. He consequently hinted by his manner that the conversation might be agreeably changed; and, as a break off, inquired of Mrs Robinson if she thought Adelaide would be long away.

“Eh, nawe,” replied Nanny, as she placed a crescent of cheese upon the table, along with some delicious-looking muffins that had been baked the day before; “hoo may be back any minit. Jacob, we’n never shown Mesthur Wilson ut her likeness; whatever are we thinkin’ abeawt, I wonder. Theaw met ha’ thowt me on.”

“Thecre theaw goes agen!” observed Jacob; “wimmen’s way.”

“Have you got her likeness?” said Mr Wilson, eagerly.

“Eh, ay,—set in a gowden frame in a leather box. Be helpin’ yorsel to what ther is while I raich it eawt;” saying which, Nanny opened a drawer, and took from it a large morocco case containing the likeness alluded to, which happened to be an uncoloured photograph, in ordinary mountings. The portrait had been taken recently, so that Mr Wilson might form a moderately correct idea of what his daughter was like at the time.

Opening the case, the first object that caught his attention was of course the image

of Adelaide, standing with one hand resting upon a "property" balustrade, and surrounded by curtains, trees, and fragments of classical architecture incongruously grouped. There she was, in the pride and beauty and grace of womanhood,—the counterpart of her mother,—the reproduction of that ideal which the absent father had seen in his dreams, and which he had conjured before his imagination in his waking reveries ; and it was no wonder that the emotion of his heart throbbed up to his lips and glistened in his eyes on beholding the transcript of a being so deeply wedded to his love. But it was not the portrait that made him *start*, and that turned his cheek pale, on further acquaintance with the contents of the case. There was a *ring*,—a *diamond* ring attached to a loop of ribbon in the centre of the opposite folding of the case ; and Mr Wilson gazed at this ring with looks expressive of wonder and amazement.

"Where got she this ring, Mrs Robinson ?" he inquired, in the most hurried and eager accents.

“ Her young felly gan it her that neet eawr Dick breek his leg,” replied Nanny, “ marvelling,” as she would have said, that their visitor should be so struck with the ring.

“ Pray God, what was his name ? ”

“ Herbert—Alfred Herbert,” Jacob replied. “ That ring wur his stepmother’s, I believe.”

“ Herbert — Herbert — Herbert ? ” The name is strange to me. What kind of man is his father ? ”

“ A hondsone chap for t’ look at. Steawt an’ weel made; reddish face; an’ broad abeawt shooters, wi’ a neck so short ut he could hardly tee a napkin reawnd it.”

“ Has he lived long in this neighbourhood ? ”

“ Ten or eleven year or so. That wur his carriage ut passed th’ bottom o’ eawr fowt that Sunday ut yo’rn here afore.”

“ Are you sure his name is Herbert ? ”

“ Well, I never knew ut he’d any other.”

“ And his wife ? ”

Oh, we never hardly seen her. Seldom stirs eawt, beawt they comn to th' church on a Sunday, and then they comn i'th' carriage."

Mr Wilson looked at the ring again ; then closed the case ; and as he did so his friends could observe a lowering expression gathering about his forehead ; fire seemed to be kindling in his eyes ; and the compression of his lips denoted the settlement of some purpose pregnant with weal or woe to whomsoever might be connected with the mystery of that ring.

The door opening, and a tearful face presenting itself at the "spear,"—the face that was all sunshine in the picture—Mr Wilson's countenance changed ; and the next moment father and daughter were in each other's arms, connecting years of separation in one long and fervent embrace.

CHAPTER VIII.

DICK ROBINSON, on reaching the "warehouse" of his friend Pothook, found that worthy busily employed in making the place look as tidy and as snug as possible, under the circumstances. He had mopped the floor with a ragged something that he had borrowed from a neighbouring "office," and was now riddling sand over it from a rather worn and dingy flour-duster.

"Good morning, Richard ! Come to town once more, I see," sung out the tripe merchant, as Dick's presence darkened the narrow doorway.

"Ay," replied the other, wondering where his friend had learnt to talk so "fine," and what had induced him so suddenly to drop his native vernacular.

"Please to wipe your shoes on the door-

mat," said Pothook, pointing to a few stalks of straw which lay across the threshold. "I'm expecting partikiler company to-day, and I wish to be the best side out; don't you see?" If you'll just kick your heels there a moment, I'll dust you a chair, a-hem! and then you can sit down."

The visitor looked round; but not being able to discover either the substance or the shadow of the chair alluded to, begged to know whence that particular piece of furniture might be forthcoming.

"Well, you see, Richard," said the occupier of the premises, without the slightest appearance of confusion in his manner, "I've a patent double-seated padded-back chair that I only bring out on extry occasions—sich as a visit from partickiler friends, or a jollification with my neighbours. I'll produce the article 'stanter.'"

Pothook here made a dive towards the further end of an unpromising-looking coal hole, whence he brought to light a heavy lumbering piece of wood, which, from the

wide and much-worn holes that pierced it at intervals of a foot or so, and the deep groove which almost divided it down the middle, had evidently once been a bed rail. This he carefully wiped with a wisp of straw; then, erecting two small piles of bricks at the required distance from each other, placed it horizontally on the top, and requested the visitor to "take a seat."

"Dost co *this* thy double-seated checar?" said Dick, scarcely able to refrain from laughing.

"Yes," Pothook replied, unconcernedly. "You'll find it'll seat two at a time, and happen a third at a pinch."

"An' wheer's thy stuffed back?"

"Well, that's imaginary, you see, like many a thing beside. Think you've got it behind you, an' it'll be all the same. You know your father used to say that things *was* as we thought they *was*. Eh, Richard?"

"Well, but this caps rush-cartin'," Dick observed, taking his seat on the rail. "What maks thee t' talk so fine, Pot?"

“ Call me *William*, please,” said the gentleman whom we have hitherto known by his patronymic of “Pothook.” “ My position requires that I should be called by my proper name, and also that I should speak like a gentleman.”

Dick roared.

“ You may laugh, young man ; but at my time of life we should begin to think about old age, and laying up for a *rainy day*. Experience tells me that a few pounds saved up is the best humbrella we can put over us in bad weather ; besides, it gets one respected. I’m goin’ in for haristocracy straight. There’s nothing like it. Make appearances, and the doors of the rich are open to you. Now see how I’m gettin’ on. Yesterday I dined along with a few friends at the Wellington Hotel, and drank with an alderman of the city. To-day I’m going to return the compliment.”

Had not Pothook discovered that high-sounding names and coloured fictions gave an importance to conversation that undisguised truth would fail to command, he might have

told his friend that the "Wellington Hotel" he alluded to was the second step of the "Wellington Monument," and the cup he had drunk with an "alderman of the city" was a drop of that useful beverage supplied to all comers by the "drinking fountain" opposite the Infirmary. But the tripe merchant was "goin' in for haristocracy," and of a necessity must adopt a language and a mode of expression suited to the class of society of which he proposed to become a member.

"Well, but it's gone dinner-time neaw," Dick observed, after having turned over and digested the strange communication of his friend.

"*Dinner-time*, Richard? Not at all. The time at which *common* people dine may be past; but our dinner is to be on the—a—board at five."

Dick looked round to see where the "board" might be; but failing to discover anything nearer the form of a table than what was made out of an old orange-box, with very thin legs nailed to its sides, he began to

wonder how a numerous dinner party could be accommodated.

“Heaw mony is ther gooin to be *on* yo’?” he inquired, not quite overwhelmed by the preparations that were going on.

“Myself and—*another*,” replied Pothook, in a pompous manner. “If you choose to stay you can go in with us; which after we have drunk our wine and smoked our cigars, you will be at liberty to turn your toes towards Hirkdale as soon as you think proper. Don’t think anything at it, Richard, but the sooner you go after dinner—the better. You see, under some circumstances *two* is company and *three* is none. Do you take it?”

“Well, yo’n happen business t’gether, or summut.”

“Business of a sweet and tender nature. In short, my friend, and to tell you the truth, it is *love*. Don’t take your hat off till she comes, I beg you. There’s nowhere to put it. All the pegs are occupied with my own hats, you see.”

The word love struck on Dick’s ear like a

shot ; but as he had come from home for the purpose of driving away thought, he resolved to betray as little emotion as possible. Still, he could not help thinking of Adelaide,—of Alfred,—of the impressive scene at the latter's death ; and his countenance assumed for a moment an expression of the deepest melancholy. He had snatched off his hat in a fit of desperate energy, as a flood of painful recollections swept over his mind ; and now he sat upon Pothook's "double-seated chair," as abject a specimen of a lover as ever mistress looked unkindly upon. Rousing himself with a manful effort from his "dumps," the young man begged to know if he understood his friend rightly. Was there a woman in the question ? To which Pothook replied with a most lively flight of eloquence.

"A woman ? Yes ; and one sich as there's none in Hirkdale, barrin' certain persons. Quite a hangel, Richard, quite a hangel. You should see her."

"Is hoo a young un, Pot—William, I mecan."

“ Well, she’s over eighteen, and under sixty ; but how much of either I’m not quite certain. She *has been* older than she is *now*.”

“ Heaw dost mak that eawt ? ”

“ This way ; I once knew her to be *over* forty by her own telling ; but now she says she’s *under*. In a few years she’ll be quite a girl again.”

“ Do I know her ? ”

“ Know her ? I should expect not. She comes from a place that sich as you have never had the privilege of being introduced into. She lives in Twitcher’s Court. The Queen, you know, lives at a *court*. So, if I’m not goin’ in for haristocracy, I should like to know who is.”

“ Well, an’ dost meean to be wed, like ? ”

“ Do you see that presshus jewel ? ” said Pothook, pointing to a ring which was suspended by a piece of thread over the chimney-piece. “ It is the only piece of plate I’ve got. I trucked for it with a jeweller of my acquaintance living in Hangel Meadow. That ring cost me two trotters, a piece of tripe, and a

plate of peas ; and in three weeks from now it will embrace the finger of my adored. Could you drink a drop o' beer ? ”

Dick confessed that if he saw an opportunity, he might be tempted to indulge himself with a “toothful ” of that beverage.

“Well, then, as none of my servants are in, I shall have to fetch it myself,” said the merchant, with a flourish that seemed to turn his humble “warehouse ” into an enchanted castle, possessing a whole army of retainers. “It’s rather inconvenient goin’ out ; but if I was to get a barrel at a time, I’m afraid it wouldn’t keep.” Pothook then took down a very black can from a foot square of a shelf, which he rinsed at the tap outside.

“You see this utensil, Richard,” he said, calling the other’s attention to the can. “It’s the most useful article in a gentleman’s house. In this I biles my coffee, my tators, my shavin’ water—fetches my beer and mulls it, then cleans it out at supper-time with a quart of cockle broth. I’ll get a pint at one-and-a-half—stingo. You’ll like it.” So saying, the

lighthearted fellow flew up the steps with the agility of a cat ; and in about two minutes was seen making his descent in the same lively manner.

Producing a coffee cup as if by sleight of hand, Pothook began to pour out the beer, and soon the two friends were enjoying their pint of "one-and-a-half" with the apparent relish of seasoned toppers.

"Now, Richard, don't be afraid ; help yourself," said the master of the establishment, holding the cup in his hand as if it was glued to it. "In an hour or so we'll have something more substantial," and he pointed with his thumb to a heap of "something," which lay in the window bottom.

"What hast gotten for thy dinner, like ?" Dick inquired, waiting very patiently for his turn to drink.

"Well, as soon as we'n emptied this can I'll make some lobsconse, and that, with a saddle of mut—that is, a a cheek of pickled phiz—would be quite a blow-out for a mayor and town hall."

If Dick had much of an appetite when he entered the cellar, it would be considerably lessened before the hour set apart for dinner-time had arrived. Whatever the quality of the lobsouse might be, the idea suggested by the very name of "pickled phiz" was sufficient to stave off hunger for a tolerably long period. But whether these were in reality the viands intended to grace Pothook's board, or were merely mentioned on purpose to induce the visitor to shorten his stay, are questions left unanswered. Dick was in half a mind to take the hint, and he hitched himself on his "double-seated" contrivance as if with a desire to leave it.

"Let me see,—you don't smoke, Richard," observed Pothook, producing a well-seasoned pipe and a very small screw of tobacco. "Well, I thought not. Bad habit, only comforting now and then. You're thinkin' at going, are you? Oh, very well. You needn't be in such a *very* great hurry neither. It'll be ten minutes, or perhaps a quarter, before *she* comes. Oh, here she is, the blessed

charmer," and a shadow darkened the window; a knock at the door immediately succeeding it.

"Now, Richard, don't you fall so deeply in love that you can't sleep to-night. I could almost pity you for not having such a chance yourself. Good day, Richard;—good day, my friend!"

Dick was about confiding to Pothook the news he had brought from Irkdale, and asking his opinion and advice respecting his own share in the incidents that had taken place in that locality; but the interruption caused by the entrance of a female whom he certainly was *not* disposed to fall in love with, cut short the interview, and brought the period of his visit abruptly to a close; so he rose to go.

"Miss Fanny Turnup, Mister Richard Robinson—Mister Richard Robinson, Miss Fanny Turnup," said Pothook, introducing his two visitors to each other; but, as "Mister Richard Robinson" understood not the formalities of an introduction, he did nothing but stare at the iron railings outside, by which

inattention he was deprived of the exquisite pleasure he must otherwise have felt at the very graceful curtsy with which “Miss Fanny Turnup” sought his acquaintance. The young man was here reminded of the observation his friend had made—that “two *is* company, and three *is* none;” so, bidding the others “good day!” he stumbled his way out of the warehouse, and left them to their “sweet business.”

CHAPTER IX.

MR IRVING'S flight was not long a secret in Irkdale ; though no one except the school-master knew the real motive that had prompted such a step. By some people the proceeding was attributed to his bankruptcy ; with others it was a freak of madness ; whilst those who claimed to be specially informed upon matters of scandal, expected to hear that Miss Dashwood was a companion of his flight. As soon as " King Saul " heard of the occurrence, he dismissed his scholars ; and closing his school for the day, sought an interview with his friend, Jacob Robinson. For this purpose the old man paid a visit to the " Odd House," just as the worthy joiner, his spouse, and Mr Wilson were sitting down to tea. Saul had altered so little in his appearance during the previous ten years, that Mr Wilson

had no difficulty whatever in recognizing in him the eccentric individual whom he had met at the "Jolly Jumper" on his former visit to Irkdale. The schoolmaster in return appeared to have some hazy recollection of having seen Mr Wilson before ; but the circumstance of their meeting, or what occasioned it, puzzled him for a while. At length, after having put on his glasses, and taken his accustomed seat by the hob, he gave token of his recognition by slowly rising and extending his hand to the other visitor.

"I have seen you at the 'Jumper,' if I mistake not, friend," he observed, still holding Mr Wilson by the hand, and looking into that gentleman's face as if comparing it with the one he remembered.

"You are right, my good sir," Mr Wilson replied ; "you have not forgotten me, I see."

"You are—yes ;—you're Adelaide's father, Mr Wilson—yes, yes,—I know you now," and Saul again shook the other's hand.

"Well, I'm glad to see you, very glad in-

deed," said the old man; "but I thought you'd been in America."

"Not at all, sir—not at all, you must have been misinformed."

Saul glanced at Jacob, who was pulling a very grotesque-looking face, in his endeavour to lead his friends to suppose he was not listening to their conversation.

"Well, no matter," said the schoolmaster; "I'm very happy to see you—and looking so well, too. Where's Adelaide?"

"Gone deawn to th' Grange," replied Jacob, "wi some moore schoo' wenches ut wanted t' see that lad afore he's put in his coffin."

"She begged my permission," said Mr Wilson, "to take a farewell look at the deceased young gentleman; and I couldn't well refuse her, since there can be no harm in mourning over him now he is dead, however objectionable their intimacy might have been when he was living."

Saul was deeply affected at this delicate manifestation of regard for his grandson, and

could scarcely refrain from shedding tears over it; a circumstance that attracted the joiner's observation, and caused him to wonder at its significance.

"Sad affair, that," Saul observed, with a shake of the head that had more meaning in it than his friends might have suspected. "Such a promising young man at one time."

"But o' someheaw he geet off his hoss," put in Jacob Robinson.

"Well, it was no wonder, seeing the example that was set him at home," and Saul again shook his head.

"Gambler, I understand," Mr Wilson remarked.

"Worse than *that*," replied the school-master.

"Indeed!"

"Well, he couldno' help bein' crackt," the joiner observed; "so we munno find faut with him for that. He'd enoogh on his mind, God knows, fort' crack a dozen yeds; so let's say nowt no mooar abeawt him. I feel a bit soory for his wife."

“His *wife*?” exclaimed Saul; “*which* wife?”

“Why, has he bin used to havin’ ’em same as he’d his dogs—a kennel full at onct?” and Jacob gave one of those peculiar grins which, with people of his odd disposition, are intended as substitutes for smiles.

“No, Jacob, no,” replied Saul; “but you know the present Mrs—*Herbert* is not the only wife he’s had.”

“Just so,” the joiner admitted; “but that’s nowt eawt o’th’ road. I know an owd foo’ ut’s had four, an’ drawn buryin’-brass for ’em a’; an’ neaw th’ owd simpleton’s hangin’ eawt his brid-lime sticks fort’ catch a fifth.”

“Well, but he’d only one at a time, I suppose?”

“An quite enow, too. I should be soory for anybody ut wur pincert wi’ two at oncet. It ud be as bad as bein’ between two humbrells in a sheaver, or walkin’ upo’ two planks.”

“Yes, if he happened to *live* with both.”

“An’ what’s th’ use o’ havin’ two beawt they dun live with ’em?”

“That’s where it is,” said the schoolmaster, eager for an opportunity to divulge his secret; “what would be the use, indeed! There are people in the world, however, who manage to cast one off that they may marry another.”

“Ay, summut like Skifter,” said Jacob.

“How was that?” Mr Wilson inquired.

“Well, Skifter,” said the joiner, “had a wife ut wur so mich owder nor hissel, ut hoo could hardly believe but what he liket someb’dy else better nor he liket her; an’ if he wurno awlus makkin a great deecal o’ fuss abeawt her, hoo’d whimper, an’ skrike, an’ say hoo’d pack up her clooas an’ mak reawm for thoose ut he liket better. Well, one day Skifter stood at th’ bottom o’th’ fowt talkin’ to a young womman ut had as many ribbins in her cap as ud trim a rush-cart; an’ th’ wife stood at th’ window watchin’ em, an’ pooin a face as lung as a bowster-case. When Skifter see’d hoo’re watchin’ he thowt he’d have a bit of a skit; so he geet howd o’th’ young womman, an’ made her squeecal as leawd as a

twitchelt gonner wi' th' squeeze he gan her. That wur th' upstroke for th' wife; an' hoo bundelt up her clooas i' rale yearnest. Hoo'd *thowt* it a good while, hoo said; but then hoo're *sure*, an' off hoo went. When hoo'd gotten to th' bottom o' th' loane hoo lookt back thinkin' Skifter ud be followin', an' makkin sich wark as never wur for her t' turn back an' be gradely, an' he'd never do so no mooar, an' that sort. Well, isted o' doing so, he sent one o'th' childer after her wi' a loaf an' a shillin'; an' th' little wench must tell her mam ut hoo'd want summut t'ate an' summut for lodgin's afore hoo coom back, so hoo must tak that, an' he'd send her some mooar when it run short. Well, th' wife wur so mad at this ut hoo seet at th' little wench an' gan her yed a good dressin'; an' hoo could liket ha' thrut th' loaf i'th' doytch, but hoo bethowt hersel it ud do mooar good awhoam, so hoo thrailt her shanks back agen; an' after hoo'd skriket a appern full, hoo went to her loom, an' I've never yerd sin ut ever hoo'd packt up as mich as a stockin' foout or a capstring, or even

whispert ut Skifter liket anybody i'th' world betther nor he liket her."

"I'm inclined to think that is only one of your tales, my friend," said the schoolmaster. "You'll find Mr *Irving's* case will turn out more serious than Skifter's."

"Who?" exclaimed Mr Wilson, suddenly twisting round, and confronting the schoolmaster with a wild stare.

"Mr—*Herbert*," Saul replied, evasively.

"Didn't you say *Irving*?" demanded the other, eagerly.

"I believe I did," the schoolmaster admitted; "and now that the name has slipped me, and as I am released from the obligation of further secrecy, I may tell you that his real name *is* Irving,—Charles Irving, and that his wife—his first wife—is still living."

"How long have you known this?" said Mr Wilson.

"Only a few days. He sent for me down to his house, and confided everything to me."

"Everything?"

“ Well, so far as might concern—people whom I know ; nothing else.”

Mr Wilson here became greatly agitated.

“ I must see this Mrs Irving, or Herbert,” he said, with a strong indication of hasty purpose in his manner ; “ she can perhaps inform me upon some matters that very nearly concern my happiness.”

“ I would let the funeral get over first,” suggested the schoolmaster. “ God knows the poor woman will have trouble enough for the next few days, saying nothing of what may come upon her hereafter.”

“ I am aware of the respect due to family affliction,” said Mr Wilson, “ and shall forbear to make inquiries until the proper season. Do you hear when the funeral is to take place ?”

“ The day after to-morrow, I am told. A friend of Mr Irving’s, Alfred’s late employer, is conducting the whole affair. He is now at the Grange, and has taken possession of everything on the premises. So the gardener informs me.”

“But this friend of Mr Irving’s must have had authority from some one before he could assume the part of—as I may say—administrator in these affairs,” observed Mr Wilson. “How can that have been brought about?”

“Mr Irving has assigned the whole of his estate to his creditors, I believe, in the hope that his son by marriage might be able to redeem it. Death has interfered with this arrangement, and now the creditors have appointed one of their own body to watch their interests until legal proceedings can with a show of decency be instituted.”

During the time occupied by the foregoing conversation, Nanny Robinson had kept the tea-pot simmering on the bar, and the several invitations she had given Saul to “poo up” and take a cup with them were as often unheeded by that worthy, so deeply, and, to his friends, unaccountably, was he engrossed with the affairs of the Grange as to appear utterly regardless of everything else; and so was he made the sport of conflicting feelings,—grief

at the death of Alfred, and joy at the prospect of meeting his long-lost daughter, that his friend Jacob Robinson regarded him as being more "off it" than usual. What cared Saul for the future fortunes of the Grange? They might strip the place of everything it contained—nay, make it fit for only owls and bats to inhabit; there would be the resurrection of a dear life that to him was more than all the world contained beside; and to the anticipation of this event he clung with the devout yearning of a pilgrim who feels himself approaching the end of his pilgrimage.

"Come, yor majesty," said Jacob, unmindful of the emotion which the old man betrayed, "bring yor throne this road a bit, an' let's never mind th' Grange till we'n done summut ut's rayther pleasanter than talkin' abeawt deeath an' plunder, an' smashin' heawses up. Come, there's some nice new mouffin, an' yo' liken that, I know."

"Eh, Jacob, I'm not at all hungry," said the schoolmaster, starting out of a brief but

absorbing reverie. “I hardly know what I’m doing.”

“Well, th’ best *on* us hardly dun that a’ together,” the joiner observed, “but as lung as yo’n nowt t’ do wi’ th’ Grange, nor nob’dy abeawt it, I conno see ut yo’n any occagion to knock yorsel eawt o’ flunter abeawt ther con-carns.”

“But I have to do with it, Jacob—I have to do with it,” said the old man, rising from his seat, and uttering his words with a vehemence that was foreign to his usually quiet manner. “I came into this village childless,—friendless, as I thought. It was a wild, mad dream brought on by cruelty, wrong, grief over the loss of all I possessed, that turned my head and made me imagine things that were not real, as if they were connected with my history. God has ordained that a part shall be restored to me,—nay, the whole; for *she* is everything to me now,—my dear child,—my daughter, who for sixteen years has been dead as it were. Oh, Jacob, my friend;—oh, Mr Wil-

son ! I shall see her again—to-morrow, if all be well."

See who—his daughter ? This was the newest of those strange hallucinations, Jacob thought, that were, in some shape or other, continually haunting the schoolmaster's fancy. During the period of their long and intimate acquaintance, the joiner had never heard his old friend as much as hint that he had been a father ; or that he had any nearer relations than whom he was pleased to call his "subjects." Now, if he was rightly understood, he had a daughter,—living, too, and would presently be restored to him. An idea struck Jacob,—what if this daughter was connected with the mystery of the Grange ? He had lifted the teacup to his lips ; but it was some time before the tea was tasted. At length, and after swallowing a huge mouthful, he turned towards the schoolmaster a look pregnant with curiosity.

"Saul," he said, "wur this dowter yor talkin' abeawt wed ?"

"She was—more's the pity," replied Saul.

“ Well, I never yerd yo’ say ut yo’ had one before,” Jacob observed, devouring muffin as if he intended his eating should keep pace with his thoughts.

“ My memory has been such a wreck,” said the schoolmaster, “ that if I had not been reminded of the fact by another person, I should have regarded it as a dream.”

“ Well, Saul, yo’ known me to be straight-forrud i’ owt I have to do or say,” said Jacob ; “ an’ I’ve bin thinkin’ abeawt Mesthur Herbert’s wife an’ yor dowter i’ turns, till I conno help thinkin’ abeawt ’em booath at onct : a sort o’ skennin thowt, yo’ seen, same as lookin’ at two pint pots till they booath go’n int’ one. Well, I’m thinkin’ agen it’ll look strange if they turn eawt to be booath one after a’. What dun yo’ think abeawt it, Mesthur Wilson ? ”

“ From the observations our friend has made, I must say that my thoughts are running in the same direction as yours,” Mr Wilson replied. “ One circumstance appears

to be so linked with the other, that I am forced upon a certain conclusion."

The solemn grey eyes of the schoolmaster were observed to twinkle; there was almost a chuckle of glee in the manner in which he shook his head and munched at his muffin; then after some strange movements which it would have been difficult to say whether they were the manifestations of joy or sorrow, he dismissed a tear by a smile, saying—

"You are right, friends,—you are right; the real Mrs Irving is my daughter."

"Eh, yo' dunno' say so!" exclaimed old Nanny on hearing the schoolmaster's confession.

"Yes, yes,—to-morrow I meet her and take her to my poor home," replied the schoolmaster, and his eyes resumed their usual solemnity as he spoke. "But how shall I break the news to her of Alfred's death? Perhaps she knew not that he was living, and has mourned him dead long ago. There's hope in that; there's hope in that."

“ Well, but heaw win th’ two wimmen do when they find it eawt ut they booath belong to *one* husbandt ? ” said Nanny, her own feelings rendering it impossible that she could see over the difficulty.

“ Well, if they’re owt like thee they’d scrat one another’s een eawt ut abeawt two flusters,” Jacob observed, with a lively recollection of an incident that occurred in his courting days, when Nanny tore a cap off the head of a lass whom she had reason to suppose was a rival.

“ They may never meet,” observed Mr Wilson, “ and it is certainly desirable that contact between the two should be avoided. Probably the person known as Mrs Herbert will follow her paramour as soon as the present excitement is over. Undoubtedly the scoundrel has prepared her for such a step. If the *real* wife, who has little cause to love her husband, would only keep out of the way a short time, much unpleasantness might be prevented.”

“ Yes ; but it would be cruel not to allow

my child to see her son, or to attend the funeral, now he's dead; yet how to manage otherwise without scandalizing the proceedings I am at a loss to think," and Saul seemed to ponder deeply upon the perplexing situation.

"You may introduce her as a relative of the young man's," suggested Mr Wilson, "if she could so far govern her feelings as to submit passively to the ordeal."

"That is it, my friend,—that is it," exclaimed the schoolmaster, excitedly. "My poor girl is submission's own self,—accepting the doing of God's will in every trial of her life. She will now do mine,—I am sure of it, —I am sure of it."

"Hoo'll do nowt o'th' sort if hoo's a woman," said Nanny, in a very decided manner. "If eawr Dick wur t' dee, I should feel as if I wanted to goo i'th' coffin with him, isted o' letten somb'dy else be nar to him nor me. What does theaw think abeawt it, Jacob?"

"Eh," replied Jacob, "I'm noane a wom-

man, so conno' think an' feel like one. But it hardly looks natteral ut a moather could look at her deead lad same as if he're nowt akin to her."

"But sixteen years' religious devotion in conventual seclusion may do much towards fortifying a woman's feelings against the sorrows of the flesh," the schoolmaster observed.

"Well, I wouldno' give a farthin' cake for that religion ut makes one like a stump, and draws th' feelins eawt o' one's crop like Doctor Hollant drawin' teeth. I could mak one eawt of a lump o' owler any day ut ud be as good a mon or womman as that. Nawe, nawe—gie me a heart ut con feel for anither, as th' sung says; one ut'll tumble i' pieces like a club-dinner dumplin when owt touches it, an' goo t'gether agen like that cluster o' nuts ut owd Colley ust have hanged o'er th' chimdy-piecke, when it hast' be tuned for feightin' agen bad luck an' th' selfishness o' men. I dunno meean a heart like a fuzz-ba', but one uts monly an' soft, an' ut winno put

nor be put on; but ud feel reet an' guide reet, an' keep th' balance o' peawr as level as a straight-edge."

"You are right, my friend," said Mr Wilson; "at the same time there is nothing incompatible with proper feeling in what I suggested. It is not to overcome inward grief, but the outward show of it, that is called for in this instance; and surely God would forgive it when required for a peaceful end."

The conversation on this subject was here brought to a close by the last excuse for remaining at the table being exhausted. The tea was over; the stack of muffin-quarters had been levelled to its foundation; the teapot had let its steam down to several degrees below "brewing" heat, and the kettle had sung its last song. As a relief to the probable tedium of the next hour or so that might intervene before Adelaide's return from the Grange, Mr Wilson proposed an adjournment to the "Jolly Jumper;" and to the kitchen of that hospitable establishment

the whole party, with the exception of old Nanny, betook themselves, where they spent the evening together as happily as the exciting circumstances with which they were individually connected would permit.

CHAPTER X.

THE tolling of the funeral bell was no common occurrence in Irkdale, for the deaths were few in that quiet and thinly-populated village, and when the solemn cadences which spoke of life departed were heard booming from the old church tower, the whole populace appeared to fall instinctively into a quiet demeanour that betokened respect for the occasion. They were heard this bright June morning, when the lark carolled high like a blythe spirit singing on its way to glory. They were heard above the voices of children who knew not that death meant decay, but regarded it as a quiet sleep from which the earthed body would awaken to assume a new and immortal existence. The tones mingled with the sounds of busy life,—the stroke of old Jacob's hammer,—the ring from

Clinker's anvil,—the whetting of the scythe of the husbandman : and the death-peal grew more solemn by the contrast.

Who listened and was not reminded of the past,—that dark period of eternity which the memory lights up with faint glimmerings of our happiest or most sorrowful years ? The pensive orphan girl, who scarcely remembered the play of infancy, wondered if the knell summoned some other child to join its mother in a better world, and wept that it was not her own turn to behold again the kind face that once bent over her like a firmament of love's brightest looks, lighting her infant way through its early paths of life. The youth who had treasured one image in his mind that would remain there so long as memory should last, heard in the softer tones the plighted vow and the fond farewells as they were breathed when the future seemed but a short, bright day, too brief for love to grow weary in, or the heart to drink its full measure of happiness. The aged villager, whose head had whitened beneath his parent's

roof, heard in each stroke some voice from the long departed,—the last “God bless you!” of a beloved daughter, as she sobbed out her life on the tear-bedewed pillow; the expression of manly resignation from a son suddenly swept by the stern reaper from the field of flowering manhood; or the feeble “I am coming, Lord,” from the lips of those who have taken up their sheaf of full and ripened years, and wait to be marshalled in their places in the grim procession of Death’s “harvest-home.”

The good people of Irkdale had only known Alfred Herbert as the generous-hearted, pure-minded young man whom to behold was to love. The period of downward life, which death came happily to shorten, had not yet filled the greedy gossip’s mouth, nor caused his friends to sigh over the frailties of our nature. His school companions, although they had noticed his face grow pale and seemingly careworn, suspected not the cause of these signs of unsettled life, but attributed the effect to the casual dispensations of nature. He had not of late, however, shown the same

interest in the class of which he was a member. When they sang his voice was scarcely heard amongst the rest ; when they prayed his reponses were less fervent ; and the meetings, which at one time could not have occurred too frequently, were either unattended on his part, or failed to awaken him from his apparently listless disposition. He forgot which were the chapters read the previous Sunday, and only “ spelled ” his scholars two-thirds of the usual pages. He feigned illness betimes, and stayed whole days away from school ; but such were his antecedents, and such the estimation in which he was held by those who were associated with him, that not the slightest suspicion of his falling into loose habits was entertained by those who knew him most.

But Alfred is dead ; and they who would have rebuked him living must now speak charitably of his failings, since he is in account with a Master whose eye will detect every “ falsified statement,” whether He allows or not so much to go “ to error ” in the final “ balance.” The solemn pageant, which is

the last display our vain mortality can make, is on its way from the Grange, and now looms grandly in the tree-shaded lane that winds round the bottom of the "Hollow." Only two mourning coaches follow the hearse, and only three mourners are present. In the first coach are two ladies; and one of them, as may be supposed, is Mrs Herbert. "Like Niobe, all tears" she is, whilst her companion has the complexion and passive bearing of a draped statue. Fixed are the features of the latter person, like marble—and as cold. No tears gush from her eyes; no quiver of the lip betrays the deep emotion of a bursting heart. Her bosom is as still as the gentle swell of the ocean when stirred only by the sigh of evening; yet—she is the *chief mourner*. In the other carriage sits "King Saul"—alone; his head bowed, and his lips compressed into a silence that seems to withhold feelings that are unutterable. Now his eyes close, and tears wash his cheeks; and his memory seems to give forth as a tomb the buried recollections of many—many years.

Now the procession is passing the "Odd House," at the gate of which stand Jacob Robinson and his wife Nanny, the former with a thoughtful face and passionless eye, whilst the latter weeps and shakes her head, and lays a trembling hand on the shoulder of her spouse, as if it was the only support save Heaven on which she could lean. Dick is peeping like a coward from behind the pig-cote wall, as if he expected the corpse to start from its coffin and revenge itself upon him on a nearer approach. But where is Adelaide?

In the churchyard are many people, apparently waiting for the funeral's arrival. Some of these are labouring to decipher inscriptions on old tombstones, the characters of which are nearly effaced. Others are brushing the dust from fresher slabs, that they may read with tearful eyes the quaint and homely epitaph which tells of some dear one sleeping below. Over one little mound that hath no stone to cover it a childless mother bends, and trims the flowers that grow around the borders. Daisies, buttercups, and May-flowers

only are planted there ; for the mother remembered that the day on which her little one took ill, she brought home a posy of such flowers from some sunny field, and none other must grow upon her grave. Near the porch stands a man who has past the meridian of his life, but is still of sound manhood, like a lusty autumn. He has a companion in a young lady of scarcely twenty summers, but whose blooming complexion is somewhat subdued by the expression of grief that dwells upon her features. Both are silent, and look painfully anxious towards the gates as if expecting an arrival in which a deep interest is felt. Now the quickening bell gives token of the near approach of the funeral train. The nodding plumes of the hearse are seen above the hedges, and the two people at the porch silently, and with a bowed reverence, enter the church. Now the organ thunders forth the "Dead March;" the clergyman, with solemn tread, moves along the aisle towards the desk, and the vestibule is darkened by the presence of death. Two ladies take their seats

in an advanced stall, but their faces are covered by thick black veils that completely hide them from view. The service proceeds, and most impressively are they told that "we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump, for the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."

Mrs Herbert had taken aside her veil as if in reverence to the divine utterances that were filling her heart with a new emotion, and at the close of the service she allowed her eyes to wander round the sacred edifice, and to rest upon two figures about whom a rich stream of sunlight was playing. They were those of the man and his companion who had first entered the church, and who were just leaving the pew in which they had been sitting. The first glance induced the lady to take a second—a painful, earnest, piercing glance; then with a wild, unearthly shriek she fell prostrate on the seat.

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Let us pass over the scene at the grave, which one mourner never visited, but had to be carried helpless to her carriage, and instantly driven home; and by the side of which another stood as unmovable as one of the mutes whose faces are a studied imitation of sorrow, though she saw the rude lumps of clay strike the coffin-plate that bore the name of her *own son*—ALFRED IRVING.

The last-named lady took her departure in company with King Saul, the old man leaning on her arm until they reached the coach that was waiting at the gates. How was it, people wondered, that they drove not to the Grange,—that instead of following the other conveyance, they took another route which lay in the direction of the little village school? The secret of their relationship was known only to a few; and when it got abroad that the lady was staying at the “Jolly Jumper” until such time as she could settle in a new home,—a home that should shelter the schoolmaster, and be as a summer’s sunlight to the winter of his years, the wonder grew more intense.

At the Grange is another new visitor—Edward Wilson; and the lady whom we have hitherto known as Mrs Herbert is seated in a state of half-consciousness upon a couch, with Adelaide kneeling by her side. And what tears are shed by all three as the past is recalled with its painful history, and its apparently inexplicable situations.

The evening wore on, and the lady slowly recovered; and when full consciousness returned she no longer regarded the person of her visitor as the ghost of her long-*deceased* husband; the account of whose supposed death, and the proceedings consequent, must be left to the next chapter.

CHAPTER XI.

THE reader must already have seen that a mystery is about to be cleared up; that the principal actors in the strange drama it enfolds are being disposed of—it may not be according to his wishes, nor perhaps as he anticipated in the early chapters of the story. But he must accept the events as they were shaped to the narrator's hand; for “man proposes, and Heaven disposes,” and it is not for an author any more than his reader to alter the decrees of fate, when once the fiat is gone forth.

Alfred Irving sleeps well in his grave in the little churchyard at Irkdale. The sins and sorrows of the world cannot reach him there. The tempests of life may sweep over him,—its bolts may fall thickly around; but his breast shall be unscathed—his heart unriven,

though thousands are bleeding near. What to him now is the sick couch, the death gasp, the hum of the passing bell? He hath not felt the tiny hand stiffen and grow cold within his own. He hath not listened to the departing sob of one who seemed to take all the light and loveliness of the world along with her; nor hath he outlived those who loved him, to be stranded on life's breakers, and battered by misfortune's waves until the pitying earth takes its own. From infancy to youth he lived a pure and happy life. It was one bright golden day to him; until night came, like a black, angry cloud, and palled him with its sin. But the wickedness which slayeth had not reached his heart. That went to the tomb pure and cankerless as when Love first drew his arrow from it; or as when the light of beauty dawned upon his soul. It were fittest then the youth should die ere it was too late to die well,—cut off on the threshold of a dark career, for such seemed to be looming upon him,—that the spectacle which disgraces earth, and offends heaven—a being covered

with moral ulcers—might in one instance be spared. Let him rest.

The grave of our deceased young friend was not without its visitors. On each evening during several of those bright summer weeks might be seen an old man, and a woman about the middle time of life, standing near it. At first the woman looked coldly on, whilst her companion wept; but, as succeeding evenings came and found her there, her form grew less erect, and her head began to incline towards her breast, until tears streamed forth in unrestrained floods, and the heart was stirred with the deep emotions of grief.

The two were “King Saul” and his daughter; the latter the mother of Alfred. She had, during the fifteen years of connubial banishment, been striving to wean herself from the world and the passions of her sex by religious seclusion; and had so far overcome her maternal feelings in the struggle that she could look upon the face of her dead boy with the apathy of a stoic. The dirge-like anthem that swelled forth from the church

choir, and drew tears where tears were seldom known to flow ; the solemn bell, and the impressive service failed to awaken the affections from their lethargic sleep ; but, as the austerities of conventual immurement fell off her, like icy garments at the melting influence of social life, so did the heart warm and the bosom expand until her whole being heaved with a convulsive throe, and awoke the soul to the sympathies of an uncorrupted nature.

Then it was that the tears began to flow ; then did she behold her son as when an infant she held him at her breast ; or, as when a growing boy, he gave her the last kiss, then vanished from her sight, to be seen no more whilst living. Daily she visited his grave, accompanied by her father, who would not leave her side from the moment of rising to that of lying down. Daily she strewed flowers on the freshly-cut stone, and now as often watered them with her tears. But her health failed her at last, and she was compelled to forego these fond attentions, which none but mothers know how painfully sweet

they are to bestow; and she retired with the old man to a home in a distant village, where she could rest her weary heart, and be as a child again—nursing her parent in his infirmities, and ministering to his wants until he, too, should be laid in his quiet grave.

But what of Edward Wilson, the wife now restored to him, and his daughter Adelaide?

The Grange is broken up; the furniture disposed of by public auction at the instance of Mr Irving's assignees, and the latest possessors of the mansion have found a temporary home in one of the little cottages of Irkdale. But as the history of the estrangement and reunion of this long-separated pair has not yet been related, it is fit that it be given here.

As soon as Mrs Herbert, whom I am now bound to call by another name, had recovered her self-possession after the incidents of the funeral, her husband, her lawfully affianced husband, for as such we must regard Mr Wilson, approached her; and with as much gentleness as a man feeling unutterable wrongs

could command, sought an unravelment of what was then to him a dark and seemingly impenetrable mystery.

“ I am almost afraid to ask you, Charlotte,” he began, “ how you account for this strange proceeding ;— how explain your conduct. But I must demand to know—as an injured husband who seeks no confessions from his wife beyond what conscience prompts her to make—how it is that I find you passing as the wife of this man—this villain—who first robbed me of my means, and now of honour and all I once held dear.”

“ Assure me that you are *living*, Edward,” said the wife, “ for I can scarcely believe yet that this is not a dream, and you shall hear the truth. I thought—nay, was assured—that you were dead.”

“ Easy to say, Charlotte, but an improbable circumstance. However, go on. You left *me*, not I *you*. I was living then.”

“ I did, Edward—I did, it is true ; but God knows how I was driven to such a course.”

“Not by my cruelty, nor my unfaithfulness.”

“What, Edward? not unfaithful? Oh, assure me of that, and strike me to the earth with your reproaches.”

“I can assure you of that; but even if I could not, my guilt were no excuse for your following my example.”

“True; but you know not yet the inducement, or how that I erred in ignorance. That *ring*, Edward——”

Mr Wilson started as if some unseen hand had struck him. His face grew pale, and his hand trembled; for that word had fallen with a thousand-fold reproach upon his conscience when he hoped to have “spoken daggers” to a guilty and suppliant wife.

“That *diamond ring*,” she continued, “which you stripped from my finger whilst I was asleep, what became of it?”

“Do not ask me, Charlotte, do not ask me,” and Mr Wilson hid his face with his hands.

“You gave it, Edward, to another lady, did you not?”

“ I? Never ! ”

“ Never? Have I then been misinformed; or can it be possible ? ”

“ It is both possible and true, Charlotte ; you *have* been misinformed. I lost the ring in a game at hazard.”

“ And who won it ? ”

“ This villain,—this Irving, whom I find passing by the name of *Herbert*.”

“ You did not then give it to *his wife* as a token of *your* love ? ”

“ His wife : I knew not then he had a wife. What cursed lie has the wretch palmed upon you ? ”

Mrs Wilson was silent a moment, during which her features were working painfully, as though her mind was busy with some of those recollections with which the last ten years of her life were associated. At length a light seemed to break in upon her ; the clouds that hung about the past were swept away, and her lips found utterance again in the following strange narrative :—

“ Edward, I thought you unfaithful ; nay,

was told so by one who swore that he was suffering from wrongs which you had inflicted. He sought me in your absence, and gave such evidence of your infidelity that I was bound to believe him. I had then missed the ring, which you know I would not have parted with for ten times its value. He said he was a broken-hearted man,—that you had robbed him of his honour,—and, as a proof of your villany, referred me to the ring. I saw it that day on the woman's finger—”

“ His wife's finger ? ”

“ His wife's, Edward, for aught I know. He assured me she was his wife.”

“ A courtesan—a frequenter of the saloons, the woman was—not his wife.”

“ I was prepared to hear that now, but not before. But, whether she was his wife or not, I saw the ring upon her finger, and, galled at the sight,—driven mad at the thought of your faithlessness, I fled from home—fled from the country. I could not look upon France again so long as it contained you, or what would remind me of my

wrongs. I took passage to America by the first vessel outward, and there sought out my aunt, the very lady who had given me the ring. She received me with open arms, and expressed sympathy with my sufferings, promising me that so long as she had a home I might share it with her. I accepted the offer, and strove to settle down in peace in my new abode.

“Time went on—weary months, and oh, how I thought of Adelaide—and of you, Edward, though you had been, as I thought, so unkind. I prayed that some power would convey my child to me that I might behold her once more, even if she were taken from me again. You know not, Edward, what I suffered during these long, long months, but still I prayed and hoped that my child might join me. Once I thought God had heard my prayer, but it broke my heart to think so, as you will see.

“One evening I had been walking with my aunt, and was returning home, when a stranger advanced to meet us. I could

not help thinking I had seen his face before, but could not then remember where. 'Have you forgotten me, Mrs Wilson?' he said. I studied a moment, and then a thought occurred to me. 'Do you come from France?' I inquired. 'England is my native country,' he replied,—'but I am from Lyons last. My name is Herbert; but perhaps you have not heard the name before. I come with news of your husband and child.' 'Is it good news you bring?' I asked. I remembered him then. He shook his head, and that was enough for me. My heart told me the rest. '*Dead*,' I said,—'if my fears interpret your looks.' '*Dead*,' he replied—'both.' Oh, God!—what was my agony then? But I strove to calm myself and listen to his story. 'They set out to America about six weeks ago,' he said,—'and the vessel they took passage in—foundered. All on board were lost, except the captain and one of the steerage passengers, who were spared to tell the sad tale.' I could not have credited this, Edward, on

the bare statement of a stranger; but in proof of what he stated, he took from his pocket-book a slip of newspaper—or what appeared to be such—which gave an account of the wreck; and there, amongst the list of those who perished, your name and that of my child I found.”

“Good God,” exclaimed Mr Wilson, “What a romance! The wretch must have got the paper printed on purpose to deceive you. I see the design—the motive—I see all now. Did you observe nothing suspicious about the paper?”

“What could I see when my eyes were filled with tears? No, I never once suspected that it might be false. It never struck me that it *could* have been printed on purpose.”

“Had he been here now I would have strangled the monster,—ay, torn his very heart out. Viper!—devil that he is!” exclaimed Mr Wilson, breaking out into a violent passion, and uttering a torrent of invective. “But it is all my own fault,”

he said, in a subdued tone. "*Had I never taking to gaming this would not have happened*, and the last ten years might have been happily spent. In this circumstance lies the principle and the reward of gaming. I who lost—lost all; and he who won—won nothing but my curse and Heaven's judgment. God—I bow to my fate! Go on, Charlotte; let me know the rest, though I may anticipate it."

"You may indeed anticipate the rest," said the lady, resuming her narrative. "This man, Edward, if I may call him so, showed such mock sympathy with my sufferings—I regarded it as real then—that I was bound to accept him as a friend, and in that capacity he often assisted me. In our frequent interviews he told me, amongst other confidences, that his wife, conscience-stricken at the wicked life she had led, forsook society, and entered a convent, where in a short time she died."

"That story is partly true," said Mr Wilson. "But go on."

“I could not help pitying the man, he looked so sorrowful. Then he was so kind and attentive to me, that he won my esteem, however my heart might be insensible to love. He continued his visits, and on every occasion gave me fresh and endearing proofs of his interest in my welfare. In the following autumn my aunt died, and I was forced either to throw myself on the world for a subsistence, or become a recipient of his proffered bounty. The latter was pressed upon me with such delicate assurances of his disinterestedness, that I at length yielded to solicitations which he began urgently to repeat, and I became his wife. Now, Edward, you know all.”

“And know you, Charlotte, that in the eyes of both God and man you were both guilty ; the one unconsciously, I must allow ; but the other with every attendant circumstance that could aggravate his guilt. His wife was then living, and he knew it.”

“Living, Edward—living, say you ?”

“She is living still. You saw her to-day.”

“Oh no, Edward; where could I have seen her?”

“At the funeral—you were in the same coach.”

“That lady Alfred’s mother? Impossible! How could I have been cheated into a belief that she was his aunt?”

“The affair was preconcerted by people who could not foresee this discovery. It was done to prevent a scene at the funeral.”

“What a strange circumstance! She Alfred’s mother, and shed not a single tear over him. How could such a thing be? A mother would have been drowned in tears.”

“That lady hath suffered too much to feel the weight of ordinary woe. Her husband’s cruelty, her long and self-imposed seclusion from society, has stoned her heart, and deadened the sweetest feelings of her nature. She is no longer a woman.”

“Where is she now?”

“Gone with her father. That eccentric

old man whom you have known as ‘ King Saul ’ is her father.”

“ What other revelations have yet to come and strike me with amazement ? Oh, Edward, how my brain reels and my heart palpitates ? If you have any reproaches let me not hear them now ; in mercy forbear. I may be better prepared to-morrow. Spare me till then.”

Mr. Wilson, who until now had been pacing backwards and forwards about the room,—sometimes stopping to listen more attentively to some delicate point of detail, or to interrupt the narrator by his own observations,—now seated himself by the side of his wife, and, taking her hand in his own, said :—

“ You know not, Charlotte, how willing I am to believe this story you have told of your being led away, however improbable it may appear ; nor what amount of error I am prepared to overlook, since I have been the chief cause of it. Had you been less a woman you would have had less to reproach yourself with ; and had I been more a husband we might

have been happy now. Let us accept this as one of the dispensations of Heaven; for had not God interposed to bring us together, we might now have been far asunder. I have one request to make, and that is, that the world know nothing of this adventure, lest people might interpret the incidents wrongly, and to our dishonour. In a few days I shall return to France; whither, Charlotte, you must accompany me: and if it be her wish, Adelaide as well."

"What, Adelaide—my child? Is she, then, living? Oh, Edward,—how I feared to ask!" and Mrs Wilson threw herself on her husband's neck, and wept tears of joy.

"She *is* living, Charlotte, and will presently be here," Mr Wilson replied. "I left her below till I knew what our fate would be—whether a happy reunion, or an eternal separation."

"Oh, let me see my child. Spare me even a moment's suspense. Let me fly to her!"

"Stay that moment!" said the husband.

“Are you prepared to see—not the Adelaide you left, but an altered being?”

“Altered she must be—grown—grown into an angel by this.”

“Prepare yourself to behold something less than an angel, Charlotte. You left this poor child without a mother’s care; yet she had done no wrong. You left us in poverty, and I had to provide for her as I could. I brought her to England,—to this village, where I placed her with a family of poor people. How they treated her you may see in her wasted and deformed limbs; her pale and shrunken features; her vacant intellect, and in the grovelling barbarism of her whole nature.”

“Oh, Edward,—do not kill me with such a description! Yet were she as deformed as an ogre, she would be an angel to me. Oh, let me go to her!” and Mrs Wilson essayed to leave the room.

“In her present mood,” said the other, seizing his half-frantic wife, and preventing the fulfilment of her purpose, “she might

strike or tear you like a savage, in revenge for deserting her. Let me prepare her for the interview.”

Waving his hand, as if to enjoin silence, and to induce the necessary caution that ought to be observed under trying circumstances, Mr Wilson descended the stairs, and immediately returned, bringing with him the savage piece of deformity that he had been describing. In rushed Adelaide—not the Adelaide her father had pictured, but Beauty’s own self. In she rushed, however, and, if not with a joyful bound, yet with so light a step, and so loving an expression beaming from her face, and with such an angelic presence seated on her brow as if holding empire over mind and movement, that her mother at first knew not whether to regard the visitation as a dream or a reality.

* * * * *

That day, begun in mourning, ended in rejoicing. Husband, wife, and child were together — short, impatient hours that they seemed until the time Adelaide was expected

home. And how often Mrs Wilson passed her fingers through her daughter's hair, and pressed her cheek as the latter knelt by her side,—let parents guess who have seen no stage between a daughter's infancy and womanhood; and found those living whom they have supposed dead long—long ago.

* * * * *

“Will you return to France with us, Adelaide, or stay in Irkdale?” said the father, after listening to a long account from the girl of the happy life she had led at the “Odd House.” “You may have your choice; I would not compel you either way.”

“Oh, Edward,” exclaimed Mrs Wilson,—“how can I part with her again?”

“It were but justice to the old people who have been so kind to her that we should allow her to stay if she chooses, to comfort and assist them in their old age. It would be like another funeral, taking her away from them. What say you, Adelaide?”

It was some time ere the girl could reply with aught but tears, so many and varied

feelings were at work within her. At length she intimated that if old Jacob and Nanny could be induced to part with her without reproaching her with ingratitude, she would return to France.

It was therefore agreed before they separated for the night that the matter should be broken to the people at the "Odd House" on the following morning; and if old Jacob did not absolutely turn Turk, and insist upon Adelaide's staying with them, "wilta shalta," as he would have expressed himself, they might calculate upon bidding farewell to Irkdale in the course of the fortnight ensuing.

CHAPTER XII.

SUNDAY evening!—a quiet, rosy sunset. Children play amongst the new-mown grass, or pluck the wild rose from the hedges, until tired out with recreative pleasure, troop homeward, perhaps to enjoy as sweet a slumber as ever Somnus sent. The lanes and by-ways of Irkdale now pour their streams of happy youth,—young rivulets that bound over life's shallows, where the sunlight dances,—away to the deep and shady pools, that with solemn, stealthy pace, flow onward to the ocean of eternity. Some of these deep and shady pools are here in the form of aged humanity,—pools which have whimped at the infant source, danced and leaped over mirth-echoing rocks, until time hath stilled them with its sobering hand, and prepared them for the final change.

Here are lovers — full of “bliss beyond compare” — toying with each other, as if life had no serious duties, but was to be to them an everlasting holiday. Others are here who have left off playful pastime, and look forward to a period when youthful pleasure shall culminate in a round of sober happiness, which nothing but death can destroy. And here are those whose fate it is to love with an unrequited passion, who see a goal they cannot reach, but are ever looking towards it, as if the eye cared not to behold another. These we meet day by day, without a thought of what they suffer, or without the least consciousness that within that rugged breast — now torn and bleeding — has thrilled as fine a chord as ever woke the soul to love’s sweet music.

Poor Dick Robinson! thou art one of these. Heaven has not made thee a Narcissus, that thou shouldest see nothing more beautiful than thine own shadow, and therefore sigh thy life away with self-adoration. No; in thine own eyes none are more ungainly than thyself; yet to that throne where *real*

Beauty sits — queen of true and generous hearts — thy knee was never bent in vain. She hath arrayed thy soul in honour's noblest vesture, to which outward grace were but as the lightest film that overspreads the counterfeit of herself. Who can say that had thy heart known utterance thou wouldst not in return have been beloved; that she whose image thou hast enshrined within thy breast would not have remembered thee more than kindly had she known how thy soul yearned to mingle itself with hers? But thou art doomed for ever to be dumb on love's sweet theme. 'Thy worship must be in silence; for thou wouldst not profane with breath unhallowed the being thou hast sainted. No, Dick Robinson; thou preferrest silently to love and suffer; to watch the vision fade that is heaven itself to thee, then brood over the wilderness which life presents now it hath departed.

Dick stood this Sabbath evening at the garden gate, watching with a passive interest anything that could divert his thoughts from the one painful subject, that of parting with

Adelaide; for it had already been decided, though not without old Jacob's making many an excuse to be alone, and Nanny's unintermitting manifestations of sorrow, that the girl was to accompany her parents to France. It was just such an evening as lovers delight to steal abroad in,—still, golden, and fragrant. Many a happy pair emerged from amongst the thin mist that hung in the bottom of the valley,—glided silently down the lane, and were lost again in the distance. If Dick felt envious, he knew not that it was that feeling, since he would not have deprived one breast of a single throb of happiness. No, rather let earth be heaven to them, so that of earthly bliss he might obtain but one cup. A fringe of poplars that crowned the opposite slope had ever been to his imagination the curtains that screened off another land—fairy-land, it might be; and though hundreds of times he had been beyond them, yet he never felt that he had been,—the atmosphere there seemed to be so pure, so ethereal, so much of the semblance of that which he conceived of paradise.

And Adelaide would be beyond those trees, in a distant country that must be far, far brighter than his own. Would she ever think of him when there ; ever say she wondered how he was, or whether he was living at all ? If he could be assured of that, and could know at the time she was thinking of him, what a source of happiness it would be !

Just as our young friend was pondering in this strain, and when in the act of heaving a hopeless sigh, he felt his arm seized by some one behind him. Before he had time to turn round to see who it was that had thus disturbed his sad reverie, a pair of sweet but melancholy eyes were looking up into his own, and they were Adelaide's.

“ Dick,” said the girl tenderly, “ you have never asked me to walk with you since we were children. Why haven't you ? ”

Why hadn't he ? Ask that little smith who is pounding at his heart as if he would beat it into dust. Ask those gray eyes that cannot look at two bright orbs which are shining on him, lest he become blind to every

other light. Ask anything but his lips, for they would never answer; they would be sealed in death before.

Dick uttered not a word, but gazed at the poplars before him until tears began to stream down his cheeks, and the tale of *love* was told by them.

“Come, Dick,” entreated Adelaide, concerned at the young man’s demeanour, “haven’t you a word for me? Don’t cry—now don’t, Dick. (She might as well have bade the clouds withhold their rain, as have asked her companion, now that his cheeks were wet, to stem the source of sorrow’s flood.) Are you unhappy because I am leaving you?”

“Ay, Addy, I am,” Dick sobbed out.

“Oh, but don’t fret. I shall think of you often when I’m away—you’ve been such a kind brother to me. Beside, I shall write long letters to you, and you must write back to me, telling me all the news of Irkdale—Pothook’s wedding, you must tell me all about that. How I shall long to receive one of your old-fashioned letters, such as you wrote

to your aunt in Manchester, beginning ‘ Dear and kind aunt,’ only you must call me sister—dear sister—and conclude with ‘ your affectionate brother.’ Always do that.”

Dick did not think once anything could have forced a smile out of him that night, yet he was smiling then, though tears trembled in his eyes; and he allowed Adelaide’s hand to pass through his arm; and somehow the gate opened, and a pair of bewitching feet were keeping step with his own; and hedges seemed to be floating past as if they were in the midst of a fairy scene, where everything moved by enchantment. How far would Adelaide wish to go? Dick did not care. Miles—miles, if she liked. He would walk till midnight—nay, till the sun peeped into the valley, so that he had such a companion by his side. On they went to where the mist grew thickest, and trees took weird-shapes like the phantoms of our nursery stories. They wandered along clefts of old “ dingles,” which the thin crescent of moon scarcely illuminated, up winding paths, where tangled shrubbery

impeded their footsteps ; and over smooth, grassy banks, where the dew lay like a silvery carpet that foot had never trod upon, and whence the Queen of Night looked envious of the golden west, as if jealous of Day's lingering reign.

Adelaide had so much to say that her companion had scarcely opportunity to speak, if indeed his feelings could have found utterance at all. He preferred to listen, however, to the endearing terms in which she spoke of the past ; of his father's kindness and his mother's love ; of his own unselfish nature, and the sweet remembrances she would ever cherish of the happy years she had spent at the " Odd House."

But the church clock struck ten, and the spell was broken,—the magician who had conjured up such dreams of love and rapture had laid down his wand for ever ; and Dick found himself at the gate again, wondering if he had ever moved away from it, or whether the past hour had been spent in sleep or waking. But no matter,—it was a glorious time, the re-

membrance of which gilded years of hopeless love with a sweet bright ray that seemed the essence of blossoms and sunshine.

The following night there was a glum family circle at the Odd House. An *empty chair* stood next old Nanny's, and upon it her son's eyes were fixed, as if the house contained nothing else that he cared to look at. Adelaide was gone. She had left early in the afternoon, accompanied by her father, old Jacob, and "Ajax,"—the latter being employed in the conveyance of luggage,—and she was now far on her journey to France.

"Hoo'd no business to ha' gone," said Nanny, shaking her head, and looking at the empty chair. "Hoo'd no business to ha' gone,—speshily wi' sich a woman as her mother."

In spite of every explanation that could be given, the old lady could not help associating a certain amount of guilt with Mrs Wilson's past life, nor could the entreaties of Adelaide prevail upon the pure-minded dame

to allow her mother even to step across the threshold of her home.

“ Say nowt abeawt it, Nanny,” said Jacob, as he sat twiddling his thumbs in the nook, and looking as “ yonderly ” as either of the others. “ Own’s own, theaw knows, th’ woald o’er, un’ ther’s nob’dy ud be as mich agen partin’ wi’ ’em as thee.”

“ Nawe, Jacob, nawe, ther’ wouldno’— that’s true; but when they lecave ’em so young for other folk to look after ’em, they conno think so much abeawt ’em.” And Nanny again shook her head.

“ Well, well, hoo’s gone,” said Jacob; “ an’ we’st a’ ha’t’ goo some time; so it’s nobbut one takkin’ her turn i’th’ great changes ut are aulus comin’ o’er us. Let’s no’ fret, Nanny—let’s no’ fret.” But tears came into the old man’s eyes as he uttered the injunction, and his face was working itself into all shapes, as if to conceal the emotion that was overpowering him.

“ What art pooin’ thy face at, Dick?” he said, turning to his son, who was gazing

abstractedly at the empty chair. "Let's ha' noane o' thy soft wark here. I thowt theaw'd hardent thysel like a piece o' hoyrn."

"Feyther, it's yo' ut's soft," the youth retorted, in about as lively a manner as would a condemned criminal, "yo're as bad as anybody, for owt I see."

Jacob groaned.

"I dunno' care," he said, "heaw soon they makk'n a railroad across th' Hollow, neaw; for it's noane th' same pleck as it wur. They met poo this owd cote deawn, and I wouldno' lift a hont fort' stop 'em," and the old man burst out into an unrestrained torrent of grief, in which his two companions joined.

But they did not pull the old "cote" down. It stands there yet in its little nest of garden and orchard; and the saw, and plane, and hammer are sometimes heard enlivening the monotony that otherwise prevails in that sequestered homestead. There is an odd pig there still, and "Ajax" is as ragged and as stubborn as ever. The ducks quack, and the

pigeons coo, and the hens are noisy over their nests, and quarrel with each other, as was their wont. But we no longer hear the sweet song and the merry greetings that once made that home what a home ought to be—a place from which the heart and the imagination never wanders to seek purer delights elsewhere.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHATEVER might have been the change taking place in Irkdale, they did not in the slightest degree affect the relationship which existed betwixt a certain tripe merchant and the rather ancient damsel whom he had selected to become his spouse. So zealous indeed had been the courtship of this happy pair, that the slightest delay possible had occurred from the time of the question being popped to the day on which the indissoluble knot was proposed to be tied. Other swains might fancy long courtships ; but there was nothing, Pothook reasoned, like striking whilst the iron was hot, and jumping straight up to the climax of connubial bliss, before the romance of the thing had been allowed to cool down. What Fan thought about it did not appear to concern him. The probability was

that, like himself, she was only too glad to make a match of any kind, and consummate it with the shortest possible delay. With her, as with him, the season for protracted wooing had passed away. She was getting too far advanced in life to fall in love with moonlight, and apostrophize the stars and the streams, and invoke the evening's breath to load itself with her surplus sighs. The poetry of such things had departed long ago; and she must now content herself with regarding them in a matter-of-fact and worldly light; so like a prudent woman she made up her mind for the sacrifice without any of that whining sentimentality which is too often shed over white *glacé* robes and bouquets of forget-me-not in the homes of the young and the wealthy.

The day that was to see Pothook and his betrothed yoked to the hymeneal waggon had arrived, and Twitcher's Court never looked so impatient for the hour of ten to strike as it did on this auspicious morning. The bridegroom had trundled the barrow of single blessedness until the wheel refused to be

pushed any longer through the mire; and he was about to try if a new kind of vehicle, a fresh road, and pulling in a pair would not lighten the few remaining miles of life's journey. As a first preparation for this great event he had stuck "to let" in his "warehouse" window; cleared out the coal-hole; transported pea-can, tripe-basket, "double-seated" chair, and his bed of *yard-long feathers* across Shude-hill, and smiled as he reflected that he was so much nearer putting on the coping-stone of his great undertaking.

The ring was provided. It had been bought of a market jeweller, who usually advertised "any article on this stall for a penny," and was hourly being polished upon the coat-sleeve of the purchaser. The "askings"* had been called over three consecutive Sundays; and now it was Monday,—the day fixed for the wedding to take place, and great was the bustle in 'Twitcher's Court over preparations of so unusual a character.

It had been a question with Pothook as to

* Banns of marriage.

who amongst his numerous acquaintances were eligible to take part in the procession to church ; who ought to be invited ; who perform the “ old Daddy,”—giving away the *blooming* bride,—now blooming from the effect of an extra dip into the little white shrimp-pot in the cupboard. It was clear that were our friend to invite the whole tag-rag of Thomas’ Street, so many would decide upon attending that neither Twitcher’s Court nor its neighbour, Pan-Mug Alley, could find sufficient room to accommodate the guests. To select a few upon whom to bestow the privilege of invitation to the exclusion of the rest would be to offend the whole lot ; and Pothook could not afford to give umbrage to people upon whose patronage his success as a “ merchant ” mainly depended. He was within an ace of deciding upon the invitation of only one couple, and risk offending the rest, when a thought struck him that he would consult the advice of a very intimate friend, who “ made ” a small “ book,” and was looking forward to more extensive business.

With this purpose in view he betook himself to the "betting market" on the Saturday afternoon previous to the wedding-day; and meeting his friend just as he was in the act of dodging a "fresh" policeman who did not yet understand the meaning of being "tipped," he immediately disclosed the object of his visit.

"Well, Jim," he said, taking the other by the button, and putting on a very important air, "What d'yo' think about Monday?"

"Monday!" exclaimed Jim, closing his book, and putting up his pencil. "Why, what's up? Is ther a foont-race or summut?"

"Well, I dunno' exactly know whether we shall go upo' shanks, or have two pair o' wheels," said Pothook, seeming astonished that his friend should be so green in the matter. "Yo' might never have heeard."

"Yerd what?" said the other, confessing his ignorance of what Pothook was driving at by a very vacant stare.

"Oh, nothing,—nothing; only I'm goin'

to try a *new game*, a little matter of speculation."

"It's time theaw did, Pot, for theaw'rt gettin' as ragged as a mop."

Pothook blushed as he was reminded of his own tattered condition, and apologized for what he then considered as an intrusion of poverty into the society of pretentious wealth.

"Oh, you see," he said, "I shall *meawt** on Monday. I've got a grand new fig to put on—no fancier togs nowheere."

"Starved a peg,† I reckon."

"Well, not exactly. They're a sort of misfit, you see, an' were made for a rale gentleman; though, as one may say, they're somethink like a dozen yer out o' fashion. They're what are vulgarly called *thank-yo'-sirs*."

"An' what's ther gooin' to be up o' Monday?"

* *Meawt* ; moult, as of feathers.

† *Starved a peg* is a local term, and refers to the purchase of *second-hand* clothes.

“ Oh, a flare-up—a flare-up, Jim ; strange yo’ve never heeard. Now, look at this an’ weep,” and the tripe merchant drew forth the ring, and gave it a few passes over his coat-sleeve.

“ Wheere hast’ fund that ? ” Jim inquired, without examining the quality of the article shown.

“ *Found* it, indeed ! ” said Pothook, grinning, and giving a significant shake of the head. “ Yo’ don’t find sich things as this anywhere. I *bought* it ; what d’yo’ think o’ that ? ”

“ *Bowt* it ! an’ what hast bowt it for ? ”

“ For a party that’s goin’ to pull i’th’ same collar ; goin’ to be *wed*.”

“ An’ could theaw goo int’ Oliphant’s shop an’ no’ be feart o’ bein’ takken up ? ”

“ Oliphant’s ! D’yo’ think ther’s no jewellers nobbut them ? I con assure yo’ ut Oliphant’s don’t keep sich an article as this ; nothink of the kind. I trade with people of larger business,—who sell Noah’s arks an’ tumblin’ monkeys ; a hemporium for every-

think ; wheere the don't bate as mich as six-pence at a horf-a-dozen articles."

"Well, an' whoa are they ut are goin' t' mak' sich foos o' thersels ?"

"Look across my hat, an' yo' can't miss seein' him that is to be the happy man," and Pothook motioned with his left thumb in the direction of the something which he called a "hat."

"Theaw dosno' meean thysel, dosta ?" exclaimed Jim, opening his eyes as if he saw something to frighten him.

"If yo' guessed fifty times, yo'd never come twenty times nearer," Pothook replied, making a very awkward bow, which revealed the extent of his neck-linen.

"Well, an' whoa the deuce," said Jim (he used a much stronger expression), "is it theaw'rt goin' to be wed to ?"

"The girl that I shall have the honour of leading to the altar," replied Pothook, pompously, "is no other than—who d'yo' think ?"

"Goo on."

“Miss Fanny 'Turnup. There, now; would yo' believe that at my time o' life I could have inflamed sich a breast as hers?”

“Well, if that doesno' byet pig-racin'!” exclaimed the “bookmaker,” twisting round upon his heel, and clapping his hands so loud as to startle those about him. “It'll be as good as a rush-cart or a camp-meetin'; by th' mass will it! An' it's comin' off next Monday, is it?”

“On that day we go to the scratch,” Pot-hook replied. “Everything's ready obbut th' *brass*.”

“Well, I should like to see th' start, any-heaw,” said Jim, breaking out into a loud laugh. “Will ther' be any chance ov a kest in, if one happens to be anywhere abeawt? Come, I'll stand ex'es if I'm axed.”

“The very thing I came to see you over,” said Pothook, looking as bright as the ring he had been polishing. “I came to ax yo' about who I *should* ax.”

“Oh, ax a'th' squad, an' we'll ha' sich a do as ther hasno' bin sin' Prince Albert wur

creawnt. We'll mak' Shude-hill think it's Lunnon afore we've done."

"Well, we shall want someb'dy to be the old Daddy, an' give Fan away. Would yo' mind bein' that person, Jim?"

"Not a bit on't. Hoo's owd enough to be my moather, too; but I reckon it matters nowt what age they are. If th' pa'son gets howd o'th' *four-an'-sixpence*, he would no' care if hoo're my gronmoather."

"Yo'll see to the cards, then, will yo'?"

"Leave that to me, I'll *card* 'em. Ther' shall be sich a turn-eawt as'll mak' folk oppen ther' een as wide as sash-windows; mind if ther' isno'. What time should we be at th' church?"

"Well, as soon after ten as we can manage?"

"That'll do. Neaw goo across to th' Cheshire Heawse, an' order abeawt two gallon o' stew, an' we'n mak' th' har'stone as slippy as an owd sixpence, afore folk are gradely wakkent."

"Is there anythink else ut I could be

"doin'?" asked Pothook, with the air of one who scarcely thought he was asking a favour.

"Well, ther'll ha' to be some tae an' rum for th' wimmen. But I'll see to th' rum. They shanno goo short if ther's as mich i' Aaron's cellar. Theaw'll be paradin' t'neet, I reckon; so I'll slip o'er, an' we'n mak' things up gradely, ut everythin' 'll be ready o' Monday. Ther's yon' new *bobby* comin', an' he hasno' learnt yet heaw to look th' wrung road; so we mun be shiftin', or else he'll be nobblin oather one or th' tother. Cont' do wi' a glass o' summut?"

"Con a duck swim, d'yo' think?"

"Well, we'n just have an odd twopennoth i' Hamblets, an' then I'll see if I conno' get my book filled."

The two friends hereupon adjourned to the "Bay Horse" vault, where the preliminaries of the wedding were further discussed, and such items of preparation named as had not been thought of in the street. And as it is commonly said that by short stages we the sooner arrive at the tip-top of a fuddle; so did

Pothook further confirm the axiom by repeating his "twopennoths" until the door was scarcely wide enough for him to pass; and the steps were so confoundedly awkward, that our friend marvelled nobody had broken their necks before then.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE day of all days to our friend Pothook had a mind to be morose on its first blinking over the sleepy city ; but after breakfast it assumed a more cheerful aspect, and by ten o'clock appeared to have given up the sulks altogether, and resolved upon being good-tempered. Sunshine was struggling among the chimney-pots of 'Twitcher's Court, as if with a desire to get behind them earlier than usual ; and as rays of dusty light shot down among a network of clothes-lines, and a palisading of mop-stails and brooms,—the latter articles gathered together for a purpose that was quite a mystery to many people, the window of a certain house seemed to break out into smiles that augured a pleasant beginning to the day's festivities. The door-step of this

dwelling would have astonished the tiled and marble floors of the opulent, inasmuch as it had undergone a process of ornamentation, the effect of which could only be imitated by a kennel of dogs dipping their feet in pipe-clay, and dancing a three-hand reel upon it. Two sleepy hens, and a cock whose tail appeared to have been the sport for all the cats and mischievous boys in the locality, stood sentry at the door, and looked on with that apparent contempt of monogamy which the propensities of their species would naturally beget. And what a jorum of children were assembled at the other end of the passage ! nurses who had never aspired to perambulators, but usually consigned their charges to the mud whenever the proceedings required their hands to be set at liberty ; boys who preferred the risk of a good whipping to going to school, and small atoms of humanity that would never be missed were loads of them to be swept away ; the uncared-for *fungi* of dark damp cellars, that spring up nobody knows how, and disappear in the same unac-

countable manner. These were shouting, squalling, and indulging in such instances of juvenile warfare, that it required the constant attentions of a disgusted policeman to prevent the rebellion being carried into the precincts of Twitcher's Court.

As ten o'clock approached children of a larger growth began to gather about,—a motley, gabbling crowd of females; some carrying bundles that were evidently on their way to the nearest pawn-shop; others with bottles that had not been labelled by either druggist or perfumer, and a few who had not rested their elbows on the gin-shop counter perhaps more than half-a-dozen times that morning. A sprinkling of curiously-disposed idlers of the other sex made their appearance at remote corners as the interest in the proceedings began to warm; and now there was an arrival of quite another character.

Mounted on something that might have been mistaken for an animated clothes-hedge, and whose progress was much retarded by a disposition on its own part to pick up all stray

bits of anything that had the faintest resemblance to provender, "Tip Jim" made his grand entry into Pan-mug Street. Ornamentative art seemed to have been exhausted upon the animal's get-up; so profuse was everything that could lend an attractive, not to say ludicrous, feature to the exhibition. A sack of the coarsest material, and folded as many times as possible, served for a saddle, whilst another, upon which was inscribed "CATTLE FOOD" in large home-made-looking letters, lined the animal's flanks from the saddle to the tail. Round the border of this "cloth" "flowers of all hues" were pinked. Ribbons made of tissue paper flaunted at each corner, and on the crupper was displayed a wreath—not of orange blossoms—but of intertwined deal shavings and thistles quite artistically arranged. The few hairs that still clung, as if superannuated, to the tail, were so knotted together with twine, straw, and paper ribbon, as to make the whole resemble a decorated whip-stock, or a milkman's pump-handle on a May-day. Two pairs of stockings,

made out of old sheets of "Bell's Life," and gartered with red tape, set off the nether parts of its legs ; whilst ear-caps of the same material, from which depended tassels of red worsted, and a rope bridle ornamented with bunches of radishes formed into imitations of stars, gave such a comical appearance to the head of our "pegasus," that his face seemed to be all over one lean grin.

The rider evidently had not neglected his own person. An extemporized jockey jacket of many colours, a riding-cap, very tight smalls, and top-boots that had been made out of several pairs, were the habiliments in which he had thought proper to array himself ; and as the animal was led by a groom in similar dress, the whole arrangement was one in which a variety of grotesque details were harmoniously combined.

"Sheawt, childer !" sung out Jim, waving a whip whose lash was nearly hidden by ribbons, "an' yo'st a' be wed when yor kale comes. Gently, Pompey ; theaw smells rum an' tae, I da' say. Let him have his yed,

Blackey, while he pikes that bid o' hay up. There,—that'll do. Neaw then, childer ! ”

Immediately the crowd gave an “ hurrah,” which was repeated again and again as the further accessories to the spectacle made their appearance.

Following in the wake of “ Pompey ” marched a procession of some twenty individuals, representatives of the Thomas' Street fraternity, each carrying some article of household use as a wedding present to the shortly-to-be-united pair. In the first rank were displayed a soap-box and a pair of blacking-brushes. These were succeeded by a fire-poker and a pair of tongs. Then came a washing “ peggy ” with only one leg ; a salt-box without lid ; a pepper-duster mounted on a staff ; a three-legged stool ; a frying-pan ; a fire-shovel ; a gridiron ; a hand brush ; several small matters almost impossible to name, and as an appropriate finish to the rest, an old oaken cradle ; a baby-chair ; a small pair of red socks, and a child's “ ricker.” These were more or less adorned with ribbons or

flowers, and displayed according to the importance with which each was regarded, and the prominence they were destined to take in the household arrangement.

The procession on its arrival filed into the entry leading to 'Twitcher's Court, disturbing the equanimity of the feathered sentinels who held guard there, and causing no little commotion in the house with the ornamented door-step.

"Pompey" found temporary stabling among the mops and brooms, whilst his rider, who acted as master of ceremonies, introduced his retinue to the people of the house aforesaid.

What a hubbub there was in about a couple of seconds after the door was opened! What greetings of the bride,—what hand-shakings with the bridegroom! The former was decked out in a profusion of artificial flowers, so arranged about her hair, which was getting thin, as to defy any attempt at imitation. A dress that had not been made in the same half century, but had been the wedding dress of

her mother, which she confessed with about a couple of tears in her eyes, hung in scanty folds from shoulders that would have been bare, had they not been covered with a napkin that once was white, but now had a creamy look, as though it had not seen daylight for a long time. Round her waist a broad pink sash, much faded from having done duty on many a public occasion, was fantastically tied ; leaving a couple of yards hanging down behind, which waved and fluttered in modest gaiety as the wearer wafted her person about the house ; and as Fan bade her guests welcome, no deeper blushes than those which suffused her cheeks need have set off the face of a “sweet sixteen.”

But what shall I say of Póthook—how describe his person and attire, supposing such a feat possible ? Had the shelves of a costumer in the days of any of the “Georges” been ransacked, no more picturesque an outfit than the one our friend stood up in, could have been got together. It would have been a study for a low comedian, who wished his

audience to roar at first sight. “Buckstone” or “Toole” might have made a fortune by it, supposing them to have had no other resources; and no doubt, had the “King of Bonny” ever met with a *fac simile*, he would have given half his kingdom to have become the purchaser.

He wore a blue coat, the collar of which held his head in one position as firmly as if it had been placed in the pillory. The tails of this coat appeared to hold on to the waist by two massive brass buttons. A couple of similar articles dangled at the extremities, and a row of ditto descended from the collar down each side of the front; the latter being as useless as those behind; for although the wearer did not exceed seven stone in weight, his clogs being thrown into the scale, the coat fitted so tight that the buttons could not be brought to within a span of the button-holes. The waistcoat had a canary-coloured ground, checked with very narrow stripes of black and green, and with tiny spots of red in the centre of each square. A “dicky,” the tape belong-

ing to which protruded above the rampart of coat-collar, did the duty of a more expensive shirt; and a necktie, whose dimensions prevented any communication betwixt his eyes and toes, concealed a very small shirt-collar, which required constant plucking up to prevent it slipping from under altogether, and displaying its fringed edges in the wrong place. How he had got his legs into his trousers without tearing the seams was a wonder to all; but the feat certainly bore testimony to one fact,—the stitching must have been of a better class than any we are served with now-a-days. These latter articles of dress were of a greyish white, and so tight were they about the knees, that they might have been used instead of bandages, had they been required for surgical purposes. A drab hat, that “Tip Jim” declared was a “cross” betwixt a Scotch terrier and a “tup sheep,” lay on the bed, in company with a bonnet which, beside being one of the gayest ever trimmed, in shape was a link that connected every fashion that had made women mad during the present

century. To attempt further description would be futile.

Immediately on the wedding guests being *packed* in the room, a very greasy-looking matron of rather stout proportions commenced ladling out the stew, and serving it round in bowls of various sizes and patterns. Other females with very red faces, that betrayed the quality of breakfast *they* had partaken of, assisted as well as their tucked-up dresses and expansive crinolines would permit in that limited space. To have seated the whole company at the table, even supposing that article of furniture had been large enough to accommodate them, would have been an impossibility ; and when we take into account the scarcity of chairs, although the household stock had been temporarily augmented by a couple of wooden-seated ones, borrowed from the next house, it would have been absurd to suppose that the alternative of standing during breakfast would create even a moment's hesitancy in any one. All set to heartily at their stew, which on that sultry July morning stuck at boiling point a

much longer time than could have been desired; and as they stood in a steaming group, sipping and blowing until their faces were all over dew, and their heads as smoky as a sweating haystack, Pothook felt that a little November temperature, drawn on account, would be delightfully acceptable.

“This ’ud be rare stuff for makkin’ top-coats *on*,” remarked Tip Jim, fishing up a lump of meat about the size of a frog, and eyeing it with profound admiration. “I feel, just neaw, as if I’re between fifty blankets, an’ my yed under a pon-lid. If yon tit had a dose o’ this, it ’ud mak his tail switch eawt like a besom-stail, or a drunken bassoon. What does theaw think abeawt it, Blackey?”

“I hanna’ time t’ *think* yet,” replied the person addressed as ‘Blackey,’ after polishing his eyebrows with his coat-sleeve. “Stop till I’ve buppied up (drunk up), an’ then I’ll talk to thee.”

“If they wur to put a candle to me neaw,” said another, who rejoiced in the cognomen of ‘Pincher,’ “I should blaze up like

a fryin-pon full o' Scotch collops. Look at this neaw." And he held up his spoon, which evidently had been made when the price of metal, or the capacity of a person's jaws, were of little consideration; "a spoon for a giant, by geaw. If this wur at th' Wrigley-Yed ther'd be a battle for it every time th' porritch coom on th' table."

"Ay, that ther' would," observed another, who with a lame teaspoon was struggling ineffectually to keep up in the race. "Talk abeawt atin' broth wi' a fork, I co this th' next dur to it. It's like ladin' th' Broad Wayter wi' a hond-bucket."

"As theaw mentions th' Broad Wayter," said a fifth, setting down his empty bowl, "I could do wi' a dip into it neaw. Pothook, send thy fist through that window, an' let some air in; for I'm meltin' like a lump o' butter in a dippin'-hole." *

* By the term *dippin'-hole* it is probable the speaker was alluding to the hole which is sometimes sunk in the centre of a dish of "thick porridge," and in which a mixture of treacle and *butter* is placed to supply "dip" to the consumer.

“Ther’s no *air* ’ll come i’ this oction,” said Blackey, looking as if a good strong March wind would be most welcome. “If theaw wants any theaw’ll ha’ to fotch it in a wheelbarrow, for it winno’ come of itsel. It could no’ find the road.”

“Eh, dunno’ set your greasy pots upo’ th’ table-cloth,” entreated one of the servers; “they’n deet (soil) it.”

“Dost co this a table-cloth?” sneered Tip Jim, pointing to the article in question. “It looks moore like a kayther cover, or th’ gable end of a wesherwoman’s bedgeawn.”

“Any more stew?” sung out Pothook, seeing that several of his guests had paused over their occupation, and were “ringing the church bells” with their spoons, as if to remind their entertainer of the approaching ceremony. “Ther’s lots i’th’ mug yet, wi’ plenty o’ rags, an’ knockles, an’ slip-throat in it. Come, Jim, yo’ll have this here ladlefull; its nice.”

“Not me,” said Jim, with a shake of the head, “I’m paraboilt neaw; an’ if I get any

moore, I'se be like a mess o' Owdham-broth, moore stecam than nourishment."

"Will yo' have any more, Pincher?"

"Nawe," said Pincher, "my barrel's as full neaw, as is safe for carryin'. If I tak' any moore in, I shanno ha' reawm for th' vent-peg."

"Why, are yo' satisfied so soon?"

"These are no' *come-agen* messes," said Blackey, again polishing his eyebrows, and handling his spoon as a scullion would a fire-shovel. "Th' seet o' one o' these 'ud freeten th' grumbles away afore it wur tasted. Husht?" he continued, setting his head in a listening posture, and casting his eyes towards the door, "Yon's th' fiddler comin', by th' mass! I con yer him tweedlin' an' tunin' up neaw."

Blackey was right. The fiddler *was* in the passage, giving a flourish on his instrument that caused "Pompey" to turn his head, and wag his whip-stock of a tail as if pleased with the music.

The bride elect, on hearing the first notes

of "Haste to the Wedding," cast a languishing look at her bonnet; and the pin that held up the skirts of her dress was drawn like the bolt of an executioner, as if that simple act itself took away all the footing that belonged to single life, and launched her—body and soul—into the arms of wedlock.

"Friends," said Pothook, rising from his uneasy seat on the end of the fender, "the hour has come; the fiddler has arrived, and as I am to pay him so much an hour, we'd better muster, to save expense. Nothin' like startin' as we can hold out. Eh, Fan—Fanny, I mean."

The lady thus appealed to had already put on her bonnet, an act that must have required considerable fortitude, and she was now gazing at a black-paper portrait of her mother, which with tarnished margin was nailed to the chimneypiece; and as she stood apparently rapt in these attentions, she would try occasionally if her eyes would wet her pocket-handkerchief; then gaze more earnestly at the expression of tender reproof that seemed

to dwell on the scissored lincaments of that dear profile.

Of course Fan could not be ready in *less than an hour*, although she had only her shawl and gloves to put on. But it would not do to appear in haste; people might say she was eager to throw herself away,—to strangle the liberties of spinsterhood with the matrimonial rope. However, she *would* put on her shawl and gloves, now that she had got her bonnet on.

The bridesmaids imitated the example of their mistress, by dressing in the hastiest manner possible; and the other ladies who were to take part in the procession were not long in removing all traces of the greasy occupation in which they had been employed, and getting themselves in trim readiness for church.

Pothook donned his beaver with the air of a tip-top swell. A besom was applied to his shoes; a weaver's "deeting-brush" to his coat; a duster to his buttons, and a moistened towel to his face; these delicate offices being

performed by "Blackey" in his capacity of groom's-man, and it were but just to say that the manner in which he executed his task elicited the warmest approbation.

Tip Jim having refreshed his steed with a small piece of oat cake, and a handful of hay stolen out of a hen-roost, mounted the saddle, and did a little eccentric horsemanship in the passage to scare away the shoal of diminutive humanity congregated at the entrance. Pot-hook and Pincher took each a lady on their arms, whom they affected to squeeze in order to get up a good wholesome scream; but the latter having lived something like twenty years beyond screaming point, only a very sedate remonstrance was called forth. The rest of the attendants, each shouldering a mop or broom, dropped into the ranks anyhow; the fiddler took up his place at the head, after resining his bow until it smoked again; the signal "off she goes" yelped from the fiddle, and "off" the procession marched, at such a pace as to put "Pompey's" paper stockings in danger of coming to grief.

“The traffic in Shudehill was completely stopped by the crowd of lookers-on,” said the newspapers of the time; “but fortunately no accidents took place, only such as were caused by the pressure of the crowd in their eagerness to get a glimpse of the bride and bridegroom, and these were of a trifling nature.” Many were the good wishes showered upon the happy pair as they passed along the route; many the lessons offered in the science of housekeeping; all of which Pothook acknowledged with a succession of bows that would have graced royalty.

“I wish yo’ may have forty childer!” sung out an individual whose appearance denoted a protracted acquaintance with bringing up progeny.

“May yor kaythur (cradle) never give o’er rockin’,” shouted another of the same stamp, making a hungry snap at a wedge of dry bread which he held in his hand.

“Who’s yor hatter?” demanded a forward boy who stood on a lurry, taking stock of Pothook’s picturesque head covering.

“Eh, I’ll tell thy feyther o’ thee!” piped forth another, giving an impudent wink at the bride, which brought a little natural colour into her face.

“Heaw are yo’ off for tick?”

“Peas all hot!”

“Trotters!”

“What are yo’ backin’ for the Seezharro-witch?”

“Two to one on a barney!”

“Eh, what a coat!”

These and other greetings, some of them even more rude, assailed the devoted couple as they sped on their way to the Cathedral, whilst frequent manifestations of an hilarious spirit showed that the “tag” of the procession were in the most boisterous good humour, a disposition which was liberally encouraged by the multitude of lookers-on who thronged the street.

Reaching the corner of Long Millgate, those of the wedding party whose presence was not absolutely required in church, filed off into the “White Lion,” when punch was

ordered, in which to toast "the bride and bridegroom," and everybody beside, so long as it would last. The landlord, observing such a sudden influx of customers, several of whom he recognized as well-known sporting characters of a certain class, inquired if there had been a race or a fight somewhere, and expressed surprise by his looks and manner that he had not been apprized of the "event" before.

"'Ther's a *race* just comin' off," replied Blackey, to a further pressing of the landlord's inquiry.

"Where?" asked the latter.

"I'th' church-yard, yonder."

"And what is it for?"

"A set o' bedstocks, an' an owd pair o' slippers."

"Oh, oh,—then it's a sweepstakes, I reckon beside, *four an' sixpence* entrance, an' a parson for referee," with which conclusion the landlord went chuckling out of the room, leaving the company to the enjoyment of a good laugh.

By this time Pothook had taken up his position near the altar, where he stood hat in hand,—Fan leaning upon his shoulder for support, and now and then receiving a word of encouragement to prevent her falling down in a swoon. Behind, in company with a dame upon whose face still lingered traces of “tea-and-rum,” stood Tip Jim, looking as sedate as possible under the circumstances. He had called at the “Crown and Anchor” to stable “Pompey,” and exchange his jockey suit for serious black; and now he had so little of the sporting-man about him that many mistook him for one of the church officials, until coupling himself with his partner, and at the same time expressing a wish that “th’ race wur run, an’ th’ numbers up,” he partially undeceived them.

After arranging about twenty couples in front of the altar, and begging of each to be sure they were rightly paired, the clerk intimated to the officiating clergyman that they were all ready to begin; whereupon there was an unpapering of rings such as is never wit-

nessed only upon similar wholesale occasions. Pothook held up his precious specimen of cheap merchandise as if courting the admiration of those about him, whilst others, who had probably purchased of the same, or kindred class of jeweller, took care not to allow of a too minute inspection of the articles they had provided ; and a great deal of sly and secret movements were being indulged in by the more reserved.

The marriage ceremony was now commenced. Faces were pulled into all shapes, as if mocking the grinning effigies over them ; and soon those fatal words “wilt thou, &c.,” and the no less fatal responses, were pronounced ; a blessing was invoked, and a prayer offered, and amongst the crowd of simpering, sighing, crying, but *delighted* votaries of Hymen, the chrysalis of “Fanny Turnup” threw off its husk, and arose the golden-winged moth of “Mrs William Dawson.”

The ceremony of the “first kiss,” which Tip Jim assisted in performing with most becoming gallantry, elicited the faintest shadow

of remonstrance from the happy bride ; and Mister William Dawson, not to be behind in these agreeable demonstrations, kissed the two bridesmaids ; a proceeding that did *not* contribute to the brightness of the sunshine which had already gathered about his wife's face.

The further business completed, such as filling up the register, obtaining the "marriage lines," &c., the party adjourned to the "White Lion," where the rest of the wedding guests were making merry over their punch. Of course "full bumpers," "no tail pieces," "glasses upside down"—were the orders of the moment ; and Pothook's health, with "three times three," "one for his wife," and "one for the kids," was drunk in the manner, and with the conditions, prescribed by the chairman.

It was here intimated by Tip Jim, that as the newly-married pair wished to spend the day after the fashion of their "betters," they had resolved upon "going out of town ;" and he, for one, hoped it would not be taken

amiss if they preferred being unattended during their journey.

Not at all. How could any one object to such an arrangement, much as their presence could be desired elsewhere? And Fan looked even brighter as she contemplated the prospect of a quiet and happy afternoon spent in the society of her dear, dear husband.

Pothook ordered a fresh bowl of punch on *Tip Jim's* account, which after being tasted by himself and bride, the two shook hands round, bade their friends "good-bye," and took their departure countrywards in the highest possible spirits.

Wending their way in the direction of Albert Bridge, the little tripe merchant and his spouse might have been seen—the happiest of the happy; the former now and then throwing up his right hand, as if calling attention to some bright spot in the sky towards which visions of future bliss were leading him, and the latter serenely listening to the "sweet promise" which every word he uttered seemed to contain.

The Runcorn packet was just blowing off its steam previous to starting, when our friends reached the bridge; so taking passage on board, they glided pleasantly down the Irwell, as far as the quiet suburban village of B——. Here they put up at the head inn, where dinner was ordered for two, with beer and gin *ad libitum*; and a jolly afternoon appeared to be in store for them, and would doubtlessly have been realized but for the occurrence of an incident that cast a shade of gloom over the whole affair.

The day before the corpse of a man unknown had been taken out of the river, and the coroner was then engaged holding an inquest upon it at the tavern where our friends were spending the day. Curious about the identification of the body, Pothook applied to the landlord for permission to see it, a favour which was readily granted. The corpse lay in an outhouse, and to that building our friend made his way accompanied by his wife, whose gay wedding attire was in strange contrast with the pallid and sickly hues of death, and

the clammy sweat which seemed to ooze from the body as it lay in that pestiferous chamber.

Fan started at the first glance she caught of the features of the drowned man ; and an exclamation from her companion confirmed what her glance had discovered, that the deceased was a person they had known for years, whose career had been like that of a comet—swift and fiery, but terrible in its end as the doom of a fallen angel. That man was CHARLES IRVING.

CHAPTER XV.

ONE morning, about a week after the departure of the Wilsons from Irkdale, the old postman was seen shambling up to the door of the "Odd House." (They always had old postmen in Irkdale, who usually carried very quaint letter-bags, that looked sleepy, and suggestive of small bottles of ale, and thick sandwiches.)

"A letter for yo', Jacob," said the venerable Mercury, peeping in at the door, which in the summer season was mostly left open during day-time.

The family were at breakfast when the postman entered; and Jacob laid down his spoon, and twisted himself round in his chair to confront the visitor; not a little surprised that such a thing as a letter should have found its way to his domicile.

“A letter!” he said. “Whoa fro?”

“Nay, see for yorsel,” replied the postman. “Heaw should *I* know whoa it’s fro?”

“Will it be fro’ yore Sally i’ Manchester, I wonder?” suggested old Nanny; no less surprised than was her husband.

“Nawe; cawr Sal conno write like this,” said Jacob, after transferring his spectacles from his forehead to their proper resting-place, and glancing at the address on the envelope. “Beside, hoo aulus spells my name with a *p*, an’ Irkdale with a *H*; an’ maks sich dampert wark wi’ th’ A B C, ut I con hardly read it.”

“I’ve another letter; but it’s for that lad there,” said the postman, motioning with his hand towards Dick, who had mouth and eyes open with great expectations.

“Eh, cawr Dick a letter!” exclaimed Nanny, raising her hands, and letting them fall upon the table. “That *will* be fro’ his aint Sally, then. I da’say hoo’s gooin’ to leave him a’ her brass. Dick, theaw’ll be a

rich mon yet, if theaw lives; mind if theaw art no'."

Dick snatched at the letter as if afraid of it's being burnt, and broke the seal in a very clumsy and unskilful manner.

The latter epistle commenced—"My dear—*dear Brother.*" Hurrah! it was from Adelaide Wilson: and as the young man stumbled over the contents, his countenance would rise and fall as a welcome or unwelcome expression met his eye.

"Read it up, Dick," said the father, "an then theaw'se try thy hond at this tother; my een are fit for nowt neaw nobbut sleepin' with. Goo on, an' begin at th' beginnin."

"Stop a bit, feyther," said Dick; "it's written too fine for t' gallop through:" then smoothing the foldings of the letter so as to be more handy, he commenced reading as follows:—

"My dear, dear Brother,—I write——"

"Howd hard, Dick," interrupted Jacob: "does hoo co thee *dear brother*? I dunno' see ut ever theaw behaved so farrantly to her,

ut hoo should write to thee same as a hoo pa'son praiches at a love-feeast. But goo on."

"*My dear, dear Brother,*" Dick again began, "*I write in haste to inform you—*"

"Eh, hoo should ha' sed *these few lines*, should not hoo, Jacob?" broke in Nanny, who had very antiquated notions of letter-writing.

"Oather'll do," replied the joiner, plunging his spoon into the porridge-dish, and raising the steam afresh. "Neaw, Dick, let's yer a bit furr. It's so far satisfactory, I must say."

"*I write to inform you,*" Dick proceeded, "*that we arrived safe in Lyons last night.*"

"Eh, yesterneet!" ejaculated Nanny, in an ecstacy of wonder. "Con a letter come so far so soon?"

"Howd ti' noyse, wench!" said Jacob, "th' letter wur happen written a day or two sin'."

"Well, what difference con that make, if it says *last neet*?" and the old dame fancied

she had set up a poser for her husband to get over if he could.

Jacob pulled a long face at his wife ; then again delving his spoon into the smoking dish before him, said :—

“Keep i’ thy own depth, Nanny. Theaw’rt gooin’ neaw furr nor theaw con wade, owd crayther ! Dick, theaw’ll never finish th’ letter to-day at that rate. Tak’ another spring, an’ crash on.”

“ We arrived safe in Lyons last night, and reached home without the slightest accident. Ma was quite tired out with the journey ; and so was Pa, but I kept up surprisingly ; and so anxious was I to visit my old haunts, and see if I could recollect anything about them, that I galloped about the streets till bed-time.”

“Ay, I’m sure hoo would gallop abewt,” broke in the joiner, in a fit of something that could not be called either laughing or crying, but which partook largely of both. “I’m like as if I see’d her neaw,—throwin’ up her heels like a young cowt. Eh, Addy, Addy ! Bless thee, wench,—bless thee ! Dick, dunno

sit snurchin' theere ; but goo on, an' let's yer furr what th' letter says."

"It's *yo' uts* snurchin',—noa *me*," Dick retorted ; then went on reading—

"Lyons is a pretty place ; but not like Irkdale. No, my dear brother—not like Irkdale."

Jacob shook his head parenthetically, and hinted something about "blazes," but in an undertone.

"There is nothing here that will ever make me forget the years I have spent with you. I ought to have said the happy years ; for they have been very happy. Indeed, I feel already that if I had wings like a bird I would take leave some fine morning, and fly back to my old nest. Would you receive me, Dick ?"

"What *sesta*, Nompey ?" demanded Jacob : "would theaw have her back agen ? Ay, I'm sure o' that. Theaw'd agree, too, for t' have thy yed shaved, an' walk abeawt wi' a mop wig on, like owd Hollant."

"God bless you all !—Grandfather and Grandmother, and you, my dear, dear brother.

I shall write again in a short time to say how we are going on. I may like better when we have got properly settled. Excuse haste, and believe me,

Your affectionate sister,
ADELAIDE WILSON."

Dick turned his head as soon as he had finished reading the letter, and did all he could to drive back a tear that insisted on coming forth. Old Nanny indulged herself with a short fit of grief; and the joiner took off and replaced his spectacles several times in the same moment, to conceal the effects of what he feigned to regard as a "womanish weakness."

"Neaw, Dick," said the latter, when he had finished playing with his spectacles; "stretch thy face a bit, an' read this tother letter."

The young man was not slow in complying with his father's request. The seal was broken, and the contents were read over without any interruption from either Jacob or his spouse.

The letter was signed "Edward Wilson," and contained a brief account of the journey to France, with some allusion to matters strictly domestic. It was a hard, dry, commercial-toned letter where it described only the incidents of their journey; but when it referred to the kindness shown by the good people at the "Odd House," it was glowing with expressions of gratitude. And in what a delicate manner did Mr Wilson seek to discharge himself of the obligations which he felt were owing to the generous old couple and their single-hearted son! Did the joiner ever think of making a journey to France? The "Ville —" would be at his service so long as he might wish to stay. How happy they should be to welcome him and the good soul whom they regarded as inseparable from his bed and hearth! But Jacob would as soon have thought of visiting the moon, as trusting himself farther than he could "wade" from the shores of "Merry Old England." Was there any kind of service Mr Wilson could render to the family? Neither Jacob

nor Nanny required anything but peace in this world; as they were mellowing for the next in a kindly, genial Autumn. Did their son desire to change his station by entering upon some commercial pursuit? No; Dick Robinson would not budge a peg higher on the social ladder. Beside, Irkdale was too dear to him to be exchanged for the doubtful pleasures of town life. Had Adelaide been mixed up with the question, it would have been quite another thing. With her to accompany him, even the walled and smoke-infested limits of Twitcher's Court would be Arcadia.

After the contents of the two epistles had been sufficiently commented on, and read over so often that scarcely a sentence could be misinterpreted, Jacob set about beating his wits to fashion a reply.

At first the magnitude of the undertaking did not strike him; but as he calculated the distance which separated him from his correspondent, and pictured to himself the array of government officials, post-houses, cities, towns,

seaports, &c., through which the letter would have to pass before it arrived at its destination; not forgetting to count upon the dangers of railway travelling, sea voyaging, and the like, and the mixing up with the grand bustle that was hurrying human life into a vortex which would in the end swallow up all things, he became so overawed by the idea and the difficulties it presented, that he half resolved to let alone any reply for the present.

Not so Dick. That youth remembered how Adelaide had begged of him to write occasionally; and now would be the time to try if his quaint style of penmanship, and his limited acquaintance with polite forms of expression, would carry him through an undertaking that was worthy of the highest literary attainments.

“Feyther,” he said, interrupting the joiner’s profound meditations, “we ow’t to say summut back to these letters; or else they’n think we care nowt abeawt ’em.”

“Well, what would *theaw* say?” demanded Jacob, feeling somewhat relieved by

the assistance which his son's suggestion seemed to offer.

"I think," replied Dick, "ut if we wur to write to eawr Addy, it 'ud be enough. They'n never expect us sendin' *two* letters."

"Well, ther may be summut i' that," said the old man, seeming by his manner to be kicking a host of difficulties aside. "But what would theaw say to her? Wouldt' tell her heaw theaw's lookt as blynt as a stone wall even sin' hoo laft us, an' ut theaw'rt gooin' slacker i'th' waistbant by an inch at a meal? Is that what theaw'd tell her?"

Dick hung down his head, and forbore to reply. His father was too hard upon him; —poor lad!

"Come, Nanny," said Jacob, "get th' table sided, an' we'n saddle this letter afore we dun owt else. An' Dick, thee wind thy lip up, an' find some papper, an' we'n see if we connot manufactur summut among us ut'll sarve a' eends. Theaw'll find th' ink-bottle i' my window, I had it fort'

mark a fly-bridge ut I're cuttin' th' tother day."

Nanny fidgetted about the table in her usually noiseless manner; and soon the breakfast things were removed, and the table wiped down, to give opportunity to the joiner's meditated feat in epistolary correspondence.

Dick tore a leaf out of an old "setting-down book" which he had only partially filled; and having fished up the ink-bottle from amongst a heap of nail-boxes, cakes of glue, and sundry other things belonging to his father's vocation, he prepared to acquit himself of a task for which he felt marvellously unfitted.

"Art' gooin' t' write wi' thy fingers, Nompey?" said Jacob, seeing that Dick had neglected to provide himself with a pen.

"I'd forgotten," replied the latter, raising his hand towards a small shelf in the chimney nook, whence he produced the instrument required.

"Theaw'll be forgettin' which eend theaw'rt on e'enneaw," observed the father.

“ An’ walkin’ wi’ thy heels toart th’ cleawds. Neaw, then, — what art’ gooin’ t’ say th’ fust ?”

“ *Dear Sister*,” said Dick, pettishly.

“ That seawnds too much like tryin’ to coax some owd maid eawt of a fortin. Say *Addy*.”

“ Well,—*Dear Addy*, then.”

“ That’ll do ; so neaw theaw may foyer away. Stop abit, what wilt’ say th’ next ?”

“ *i write these few lines hoping—*”

“ Ay, that’s abeawt it. Summut like owd Colley ust to do when he wrote for pensions. Be sure theaw speeals it reet.”

Dick, though totally unacquainted with the rules of composition, had nevertheless been well trained in orthography, and could “speeal” correctly most of words in ordinary use without the aid of a dictionary, which is more than a good many professedly learned people can boast of.

The young man now commenced writing—to him a laborious occupation ; and as he took the pen off the paper at every downstroke, it

was some time before the first sentence was completed.

“Heaw far hast’ gotten yet?” Jacob inquired, seeing that the writer had paused, apparently for lack of matter.

Dick repeated as follows—

“i write these few lines hoping to find you in good Health as it leaves me at present Thank god for it and father too and mother too all are in good Health.”

“Theaw may put it in ut th’ pig has had th’ measles,” Jacob suggested, with some doubts running in his mind as to whether the bacon would not be somewhat impaired in quality by the distemper.

—“*the pig has had the measles,*” wrote Dick.

“An’ fo’en off wi’ its swillins,” Jacob added.

—“*and fallen off with its swillings,*”— Dick repeated.

“Let’s see, theaw needs say nowt abeawt th’ ducks an’ hens ; they’re as reet as wooden clocks.”

But Dick, anxious to cram as much matter as possible into the letter, *did* say something about the ducks and hens, which he described as being as right as “wooden clocks.”

“I da’say,” said Jacob, “hoo’ll want summut to laith (laugh) abeawt. Tell her ut Ajax, —little mettlesome divule—has sent his heels through a drink-mug ut stood at th’ back-dur.”

Dick described the last-named incident as well as he knew how.

“Theaw may tell her, too, ut I’m makkin a new meal-ark for owd Dirty Thumbs, an’ ut I ha’ to mak’ it eawt of a barn-dur ut’s as full o’ nails as an owd clog, damper it!”

The scribe wrote again.

“Neaw, Nanny, has theaw nowt to put in? Wimmen are seldom fast for a word, whether they’n owt to talk abeawt or not,” and Jacob grinned as he flung the question at his spouse, who was slow at taking the hit.

“Well,” said Nanny, “theaw may say I’m

mich as usal, for owt I know. Tell her I keep havin' a pain i' my breast when th' wynt comes eawt o'th' yest (east), an' that swimmin' i' my yed gets no better."

"I wonder what wimmen 'ud do if wurno' for havin' bits o' ailments abeawt 'em?" said Jacob, chuckling in his quiet, gleeful manner. "They sarve booath to talk abeawt an' to grunt at; an' wimmen are never so reet as they are when they're a bit wrang."

"It does no' want *thy* motty," ejaculated Nanny, taking up her lord and master as she would a meddling washerwoman. "If yo' men had th' hawve to go through ut wimmen han, they'd let nob'dy abeawt 'em have a bit o' quietness. That they wouldno'."

"What mun I say, moather?" Dick inquired, looking up from his task, and biting his pen, as if puzzled how to arrange the various sentences so as to be intelligible. "Mun I tell her yo'n—"

"Ay, an' theaw may say I've a smatterin' o' rheumatic in one arm; an' ut I welly think I'se begin o' wearin' red flannel waistcoats

when winter comes agen ;” and Nanny commenced rubbing her arm, as if talking about it had induced a sudden attack of the malady complained of.

The scribe grunted a hopeless grunt. How could he with a single pen, and only one hand to guide it, write down such things as were proposed to him ? The task would puzzle “King Saul,” he was sure. His mother’s ailments, his father’s interpolations, and the ideas that crowded up in his own mind, which would in themselves defy all his powers of expression—how could he arrange and transfer to paper such a tangled mass of matter ? However, as if in defiance of these difficulties, or recklessness as to the method of getting over them, the pen was set a-going. Nervously it went up and down, now with a jerk,—now with a desperate flourish, and then creeping timidly over the paper, as if piloting its own way through a fog that thickened as it went. Often would Dick’s “Pegasus” come to grief on the way, especially when encountering some hard word or

misty sentence; and the flounderings it made amongst the ink would as often necessitate the application of the tongue, schoolboy fashion, to obliterate the sorry evidences of the writer's shortcomings.

"Theere!" he said at last; and he flung down the pen as he uttered the exclamation,—"it's deawn o' someheaw; but if hoo con mak' owt on't, it's moore than I con. It's fotched some swat (sweat) eawt o' me, at any rate."

"Let's yer it read then," said the father, adjusting his eyebrows, and settling himself in his chair as if preparing for a feat of criticism that would have done honour to a knight of the paper-knife.

Dick took up the paper, and eyeing it askance, as if requiring an oblique vision to make out its contents, commenced a slow rendering of the precious document.

"lancashire irkdale june 22th 1858

dear addy i write these few lines hoping to find you in good Health as it leaves me at present Thank god for it and father too and

mother too all are in good Health the pig has had the measles and it has fallen off with its swillings but the ducks and hens is quite as right as a wooden clock father is making a new meal-ark for old dirty thumbs out of a barn door that is as full of nails as an old clog he is quite well and Ajax has sent his heels through a drink mug that stood at the back door mother is quite well and she has got bits of pains in the head and a Swimming in the arm and rumatiz in the breast with wearing red flannel when the wind is in the east and—”

“Theere, by-the-dam !” exclaimed Jacob, interrupting the reader in a very muddy passage. “They’d ha’ to stond o’ ther yed for t’ mak’ that eawt reet, I think. But goo on. When they known whoa’s written it they’n think it matters nowt.”

“I’ve finished,” said Dick, “obbut polish-in’ off wi’ summut ut’ll mak’ it feel smoot i’th’ meawth.”

“Theaw’s sed nowt abeawt thysel yet, theaw berm-yed,” hinted the father, with a disposition to utter very strong sentiments.

“Tell her theaw’rt as big a yorney as ever ; an if that winno be as good a polishin’ off as theaw could give, theaw mun try a bit o’ bec’s wax an’ tirpytine.”

Dick dropped his countenance, and commenced scrawling something in addition to that he had already written, and which he affected to screen with his left arm, as if from a whole firmament of eyes that he might have imagined were at that moment peering over his shoulder. At length the subscription was penned ; the writer took a long breath,—scratched his head, then commenced folding the letter with as much care as he would have bestowed on the making-up of a silk “cut.” The letter sent by Adelaide contained a stamped and directed envelope, so that there required no further test of Dick’s literary powers ; a circumstance that brought with it considerable relief to all concerned.

This matter settled, the joiner rose from his chair, put on his apron, and the next minute was beside his bench, plying his hammer, and humming the while one of those

quaint melodies that always indicated his temper to be at its serenest point.

Dick did not feel at all in humour for his loom. He could not dismiss the letter so suddenly from his mind. He had secretly put in language which with a little stretch of the imagination might be construed into an expression of love; and he wondered how Adelaide would receive it. He half regretted having done such a thing already; but it was now too late to undo it. The letter was sealed, and it lay upon the table like a formidable something that might be expected to explode in his face, and punish him for his presumption.

In order to compose himself for his day's duties, our young friend had recourse to that locality sacred to meditation and the wrestlings of love—the pig-cote wall. Here he planted his elbows as if with the desperate intention of never removing them until there came a word of hope from France, borne on the gentle southern breeze that was then wantoning around him. Now he would fancy Adelaide

was playing near him,—that he could hear her voice—ringing in those clear dulcet tones that had so often set his heart in a gallop. He could see her in the pink-ribboned bonnet, which on summer mornings he had seen mingling with the wild roses that grew in the hedges by the lane-side. But as he contemplated the picture thus created, it faded gradually from his sight, and the sweet voice-tones died away in faint whisperings, and the fairy presence that for a moment held his soul in a dream of rapture vanished like some bright scene that the evening mist enshrouds.

CHAPTER XVI.

SEVERAL months elapsed ere the old postman again showed his weather-beaten face at the "Spear" of the "Odd House;" and now it was deep winter,—slushy and sloppy from rain and snow; and the wind was of that intense coldness which penetrates piles of top-coats, and finds out chinks in cottage doors and windows that were undiscovered before.

The season was bordering upon Christmas, so closely that people had begun to remark to each other as they met—"days cannot be much shorter." Indeed, they could not; for weavers, those who had any work to do, no sooner blew out their candles than they had to light them again. But employment in the handloom branch was scarce; and the "pegs" of candles that hung over the till of "Owd Dirty Thumbs'" little shop were dustier than they

ought to have been from hanging there too long. Few there were of the loomster craft who wanted "long eights;" "sixteens" were in the greatest demand; and even these were dispensed with wherever a blink of fire-light could be obtained of sufficient illuminating power to enable people to see their way about the house.

Uncomplaining hunger satisfied itself with a joke at poverty, as if it was the jolliest thing in the world to have an empty cupboard and a full shop-book. It was only such as were eager to be rich at any price who pined and fretted, and told pitiful stories to their neighbours. The man whose ambition lifted him no higher than the possession of a chair and a table and the usual porridge meal, sang his song still; had a twinkling eye, and laughed to think what a disappointment it would be to the mice, finding the meal-box empty. Society will sometime have need of these come-day, go-day sort of people, who pass through life with such an unobtrusive step, that they jostle us not in our scramble after wealth. It

were an easy matter to make a fortune when few cared about it ; but when the many—one by one—strip themselves for the race ; and “ lay back their ears,” and brace their muscles with a determination not to be the hindmost, that clod of a fellow who has just sense enough to know his right-hand pocket from his left, but who has “ made money” notwithstanding, will wonder what the world is driving at.

Day was just breaking over Irkdale,—if that can be called day which is only a very indifferent twilight. Rain and hail and snow,—the latter in such large, limp flakes, that they resembled very small “ dishclouts,”—swept down the valley in dense ragged showers, causing pools and ditches to overflow, and the river to roar and plunge, where before it only sang sweet melodies. The elements had evidently mustered in battalions for waging sternest warfare, the wind leading on to its own martial music. With gloomy grandeur the sky hung out its banners, as grim ranks of rain and hail and snow poured themselves over helpless

fields, and battled with naked forests that bowed their tops, and moaned as if in the death-agony, or hopeless that the young and gentle spring would survive to again array their shorn and battered limbs in fresh green garlands.

Jacob Robinson, always up early, sunshine or gloom, winter or summer, sat by a fire of his own making; a fire that laughed defiance to the assailing tempest, although it "huddered" about the chimney-top as if struggling to get down and make a "forlorn hope" dash into its enemy's stronghold. Our old friend was engaged in poring over the discoloured pages of an old volume with cocked-hatted gentry and short-waisted ladies on the frontispiece; for he had an antipathy to new books, and preferred to select such as he read in the manner some reviewers are said to—by the *smell*. If they were odorous of mould and mildew, they were sure to have been written by authors who took time over their work; and did not think and write by steam. This book he held so near to the fire, in order to catch its

light, that the covers were drawn like the back of a red-herring during the process of being broiled on a gridiron.

Notwithstanding the subject was one deeply interesting to men of antiquated tastes, Jacob could not help now and then taking his attention off the book, that he might listen to and look out upon the storm. Old Nanny and Dick were still housed in slumber; and though the latter snored so loudly betimes as to waken the house, he might now have "driven pigs" in the loudest key without being heard above the howling of the tempest.

But the garden-gate was heard to bang as if it had been seized by a giant's hand, and dashed against the gate-post. Jacob felt sure it was the garden-gate; and he rose from his seat, and went to the window.

It was difficult to see anything distinctly through the storm-bespattered window; but there was just sufficient opportunity afforded the joiner to observe a figure, evidently swelled in its proportions by layers of sacks piled upon each other, labouring slowly up the paved walk,

assisted by a stick of such unwieldy dimensions, that each effort to move appeared to be the last. Jacob could further make out on a nearer approach that this figure was the person of the old postman, out on a morning such as that; his long white hair dripping like an "easing" from the overflow of a pool which had been formed in the hollow of his shrunken hat-crown.

Our friend was not in the habit of flying; but he now made such haste to open the door, as completely upset his vaunted theory that there was time to do everything without being in a hurry.

"Thank thee, Jacob,—thank thee, lad!" the old message-bearer exclaimed hoarsely, as he shook his mound of sacks, which disposed of quite a shower in the porch. "It's a weary mornin', is it no'?"

"It is, John;—it is," said Jacob, with a look full of commiseration for the poor old man's storm-battered condition. "Come in, an' poo yor weet things off, an' warm yo'."

"Eh, nawe, lad; I munno do that. I'm

behind wi' my reawnd as it is, an' I know heaw folk grumble if I'm a bit too late wi' ther letters."

"Would they grumble ov a mornin' like this?"

"Ay,—they would,—they would for sure. An' folk, too, ut are yunk an' hearty, an' ut han ther letters takken to bed wi' ther breakfast, Jacob. What dost think abeawt that?"

"I think it's a—" The joiner was evidently bent upon uttering a very strong expression, had not the postman stopped him short by producing a letter that was very sleek and suggestive of good feeding.

"A letter for thee, Jacob: a forrin un, I think," said the old man, adjusting his sacks so as to keep dry the remainder of the packets he had to deliver. "It'll be th' last I shall ha' to bring yo'."

"Heaw's that?" Jacob asked.

"Well, I'm gettin' to th' eend o' my reawnd, theaw sees. I'm seventy-seven come Kesmus; an' it's time I're laid by like other owd lumber."

By this time Jacob had opened the packet, which he described as being “a fat un,”—when to his utter amazement out tumbled a number of bank-notes ;—fives, tens,—a heap of them, amounting in all to the sum of one hundred pounds.

The letter accompanying this enclosure was so brief, that Jacob was not more than a minute in going over its contents. It was from Edward Wilson, and simply expressed a desire that the recipient would devote the sum remitted towards making his neighbours happy during the coming Christmas.

“Poo yor secks off, John,” said Jacob, dragging the postman to the fire, and looking into his face with a wild, glad stare. “If this is yor last reawnd, yost goo no furr.”

“Eh, Jacob, Jacob,” remonstrated the other, “goo I mun, or else some good body or other ’ll be complainin’ at th’ warkheawse ut I hanno done my duty as I owt ; an’ they’n be gettin’ my bit o’th’ pay stopt.”

“If they dun I’ll stop ther ears wi’ my

fist. Come,—doff yor *thatch*, an' let's see if yor timbers are reet."

"Well, I dunno know whether I con or not. These secks feel same as if they'r'n glued to me. Wilt get th' tongs an lift 'em off one at once, an' we'st happen manidge between us."

"Let's see," said Jacob, taking hold of the pile of sacks as he would a peck of fresh oat-cakes, and lifting them in a mass from the old man's shoulders. "I'll saddle these in a snifter. Neaw then, poo thoose beehives fro' reawnd yor legs, an' keawr yo' deawn i' my cheear, an' mak' yorsel as comfortable as yo' con; an' I'll see if these letters conno' find a new pair o' legs fort' carry 'em."

Old John, relieved of his wet upper covering, here commenced unwinding sundry thick bands of hay which encircled each leg from the knee to the ankle, and which, from the heat the fire emitted, dispensed a cloud of steam about the hearth. This done, he resignedly dropped himself in the arm-chair,—threw back his head, and by the time his friend

had disposed of the dripping sacks, the old man was sleeping like a child tired out with its play.

“Poor owd felly!” said Jacob, gazing thoughtfully at the wrinkled face which death appeared suddenly to have frozen as the storm of life was tossing it in billows. “Poor owd felly!” he repeated, frowning as he would in the face of an unfeeling world, that condemned to poverty and pitiless toil old age, which should settle like a calm autumn day into a mellow sunset. “I should like someb’dy to see this pictur’ ut doesno’ believe there’s owt o’th’ sort to be met with; folk ut praichn o’er good suppers ut th’ woald’s gooin on as grade-ly as owd Time hissel, becose they see nowt nobbut gowd an’ silk an’ finery—shoinin coats an’ fat black gaiters, an’ faces ut are rosy wi’ good atin’ an’ drinkin’. I *should* like ’em to see it, if it wur for nowt nobbut ut they could goo whoam, an’ i’sted o’ prayin’ for thoose ut would have everythin’ i’ this world, an’ a comfortable two-armed checar i’th’ next, they met beg a bit o’ rest for thoose ut a’ ther life han

poo'd at th' hard eend o'th' rope, an ne'er put ther hont up till deeach has laid 'em o' ther back. An' this owd chap fowt at Wayterloo, an' at Leipsic, an' at mony a hard battle beside, *an' he's no pension for it*, noather. He're at Peterloo, too, wheere folk went as quiet as lambs, and wur slaughtered like 'em, becose they wanted bread. Sin' then he's woven till his een ud sarve him no lunger, an neaw his droppin' into th' warkheawse for t' dee wheere nob'dy 'll sheed a morsel o' eewayter o'er him. Eh, dear, dear me;—this dampert woald!”

As a further relief to his feelings after this burst of humble rhetoric, the joiner commenced kicking, in a very demonstrative manner, the bottom step of the stairs.*

“Neaw, Dick!” he called out, “dost yer heaw busy th' weather is, an' thee idlin' thy time away i' bed? Ger up! I've a job for thee ut theaw'll like.”

* In many of our old-fashioned houses inhabited by weavers the bed-room stairs project into the house-place.

Immediately there was a bump upon the bed-chamber floor that Jacob knew well how to account for ; and the next minute saw the scarcely half-wakened son scratching his head at the kitchen door.

“What is it yo’ wanten me for, feyther?” said Dick, contemplating the postman with a puzzled look, and wondering at the time if there was a letter from Adelaide Wilson.

“Theaw’rt never feeart of a bit o’ weather, arta?” demanded the father, glancing at the window, to which small “dishelouts” were still gaily attaching themselves.

“Not if it’s owt i’ reason,” Dick replied, in a manner that would seem to dispense with any number of umbrellas ; “but this is rayther of a queer sort. I dar face it, too, if owd John theere dar.”

“That’s reet ; theaw’s a fust-rate chance neaw. Th’ owd lad’s worn eawt, theaw sees. He could get no furr, though he sed he could ; for theaw knows he’re aulus gam’ to the back-booane, an’ wouldno’ give up at a thing till

he're fairly throttl't off it. He's a two-thri * letters wanten 'liverin'; an' if young legs are feeart o'th' job, owd uns may give it up, I think. What sesta?"

"Oh, I see; yo' wanten *me* to do it."

"That's abeawt th' length on't, if it wur fairly messurt. Theaw may put my owd wrap-rascal (top-coat) on. It's gone through th' bruck mony a time; an' belike it winno shy at a sope o' rain."

Jacob took up the letters which the postman had laid upon the table, and after shuffling them about as dexterously as he would so many pieces of foot-square board, read over the several superscriptions.

"Theaw'll not ha' far to goo, Dick," he said, mentally calculating the distance which lay between each place of call. "Two miles 'll cover it."

"They're two *Yorshur* miles, too, feyther," observed Dick, who from a more recent acquaintance with the neighbourhood, had a

* *Two-thri*: two or three, a few.

better idea of the respective distances to be traversed than had his parent.

“Well, theaw wouldno’ be to a yard or two if theaw’re gooin’ upo’ *some* sort o’ ar-rands ; an’ when I tell thee ut ther’s a bit o’ summut moore to do beside carryin’ th’ letters, theaw’ll say ut theaw wouldno’ care if it wur twice as far. Look thee here, new!” And he took up the envelope containing the bank-notes received from Mr Wilson.

“Wherever han thoose come fro, feyther ?” Dick exclaimed, his hair seeming to bristle up with amazement.

“What wouldt’ think if I tow’d thee ut cawr Addy had sent ’em ?” Jacob observed, with as much triumphant swagger in his manner as his naturally modest disposition would permit.

“Eawr Addy !”

“Ay, Nompey, cawr Addy ; an’ ut every penny on’t must be spent i’ buyin’ a dinner an’ summut beside for thoose ut han nowt nobbut a empty buttry.”

“Heaw mich is ther, feyther ?”

“ A *hundert peawnd*, mon ; crack thy ears wi’ that. A *hundert peawnd*, Nompey ! ”

Dick rose from the chair upon which he had just seated himself—trembling at the moment from head to foot. A hundred pounds ! Good God ! God *is* good—God *is* good ! That was the young man’s uppermost feeling at the time. A hundred pounds to be given away—and sent by an angel, too ! The latter circumstance alone would give to every coin its double value. And the blessings that would rise from every heart, and the lips that would pronounce Adelaide’s name—*his own* Adelaide (would to God she were), ringing such music in his ear as never enthusiast heard in his dreams of heavenly rapture,—oh, it would—it would make him mad with joy !

Mad ! He was mad then as ever maniac was. He called fives *tens*, tens *hundreds*, making a *thousand* pounds of the notes he was handling, and appropriately finishing his calculation with a roar of frantic delight that not only awakened the sleeping postman,

but caused an inquiry from up-stairs as to what was the matter.

“Eh, Jacob!” exclaimed old John, as if forgetting what the joiner had undertaken to do; “I mun be gooin’, I mun, lad—I mun.”

“Sit yo’ still whcere yo’ are,” said Jacob, placing his hand upon the old man’s shoulder, “or else I’ll nail yo’ fast to th’ cheear wi’ a five-inch nail. This madlock here (pointing to Dick) is gooin’ to ’liver your letters as soon as he can get cawt of his tanterum. So sit yo’ still, an’ yo’st warm yor nose o’er some hot coffee in two-thri minits. Neaw, Dick (turning to his son, who was still rapt in a fit of ecstacy), theaw mun get these notes changed at oather owd Dirty Thumbs, or th’ Jumper, an’ w’en start o’ fillin’ empty ballies as soon as ever we con. Get my owd rockilo (*roquelaure*) on, an’ be gooin’. Have a warm pint at th’ Jumper, for a start, an’ it’ll mak th’ rain drop off thee like off a duck’s back.”

Dick reached down his father’s top-coat, a garment that would have made him a complete

suit of clothes, with gaiters to boot ; then scrambling hold of the notes and letters, which he mixed up with each other in a very thoughtless manner, dashed out into the storm, apparently with as little dread of its fury as if it had merely been a toy storm got up for the amusement of children.

Our young friend found himself engaged in an undertaking that required considerably more tact than he was at first aware of. From want of a proper arrangement of the letters, so as to take the places of delivery in rotation, he had several times to retrace his steps, making thereby the journey doubly tedious and perplexing. But what did Dick care ? His heart was too light for his legs to complain about carrying it, even on such a morning as that. Beside, if there were any cobwebs about his person, they would have so much better a chance of being swept away, that was all.

“ Theere, neaw ! ” he ejaculated, after he had delivered the last letter ; “ that’s domino, at any rate ; so neaw for th’ Jumper ! I’ve a

good mind to have a quart i'sted of a pint; I feel so swimmy. Stop a bit, I'll co' at owd Dirty Thumbs' th' fust, an' get change if I con; that'll be th' best. Ther's nob'dy i' this woald as weel off as *me* neaw; noather a king nor a queen. I feel as if I're made o' cork, that I do. If ther' a middlin' height of a hedge abeawt I'd jump o'er it, if it wur nobbut for th' mank on't. Ha—dash it! *that's* aulus starin' me i'th' face; I wish it 'ud tumble." He had caught sight of the Grange, and the shudder which crept over him, as he contemplated the dreary aspect of that deserted mansion, and the painful recollections that would intrude themselves upon his memory at such times, took away a little of the buoyancy that had made his journey so light an undertaking.

CHAPTER XVII.

“ OLD Dirty Thumb’s ” little shop squatted itself at a corner of the village whence an oblique view of the church gates, together with such remains of the parish stocks as had survived the depredations of Time and mischievous children, would obtrude itself upon the customers as they stood at the counter, waiting their turn to be served.

It was a very small shop ; but a very large one in the estimation of its proprietor, who hummed from morning till night as he buzzed about among the sacks and tubs and canisters that thronged the space allotted to them. Scarcely an inch was there in this little repository that was not occupied by something. Sacks stood upon sacks ; flitches of bacon hung like tempting banners from the ceiling, and tubs were made into platforms, from which

blocks of cheese, lumps of butter, and a japanned treacle-can preached to the hungry of the comforts attending a well-stocked pantry.

The window, which was little larger than an overgrown street lamp, had something more to do than devote itself to the profitless purpose of admitting light, as it was made the show-room for such small articles of merchandise as could be stored within its limits. A number of tobacco-pipes, arranged so as to form an imitation of a fan, occupied one corner; a small pyramid of soap reared its diminutive head in the centre, and a mummy herring—contemplating with its one eye the dimensions of a pigmy carrot which had kept it company so long that the two appeared to have grown into each other's liking, made a sepulchre of the other corner. On a very small shelf were placed jars containing sweetmeats, pickles, powderblue, and "picker-parings." A lip of bracket bore a tumbler glass half filled with peas, dried to such hardness, that the most covetous school-boy would have deliberated before risking his

teeth upon them. A twine net, hanging from a nail, displayed a medley of worsted and cotton in balls, worsted and cotton in skeins, knots of tape, knots of staylaces, and a meagre assortment of coloured bobbins. A spigot and brewing-hose, two packets of starch, a "wire" of pickers, and an iron bowl containing farthings, littered the remaining portion of the window-bottom; and the general feature of this display was so closely in character with everything about it, that had a single article been displaced, it would have destroyed the harmony of the whole arrangement.

The ledger which Old Abraham Fitton* kept was open to the inspection of all comers, as it consisted of a number of boards chalked over with what to a stranger would be an array of most unintelligible hieroglyphics. A

* The nickname of "Dirty Thumbs" had been given to our worthy shopkeeper, not because he had any particular antipathy to soap and water, but from the fact of his left thumb having, on several occasions, been detected in the act of helping down the "serving" end of the scales, when weighing out provisions to juvenile customers.

large X stood for *ten shillings*; a small ditto represented no larger a sum than a *farthing*. A long straight chalk indicated a *penny*; a short ditto, a *halfpenny*. A “full moon” shone for a *shilling*, whilst a “half-moon,” as may naturally be supposed, was the symbol adopted for *sixpence*. The whole was set down on the board, not in lines or columns, but disposed more after the fashion of the “seven stars” on an alehouse sign. These boards were hung anywhere about the shop where a nail could be conveniently driven; so that the customers generally could ascertain at a glance how much their neighbours had drawn upon the credit of the concern.

Old Abraham was humming as blithely as if the shop had been filled with condensed sunshine, when Dick Robinson presented himself at the counter; and the salutation with which he greeted our young friend was such as bespoke an imagination most serenely possessed at the time.

“Fine mornin’, Dick!”

“Ay—o’th’ *sort*,” replied the latter, grin-

ning; "but I think it 'ud hardly do for hay-weather, as *fine* as it is."

"Well, not exactly," admitted the shopkeeper, opening the till from habit, and passing his fingers through a mound of copper; "but we may expect a bit o' queer weather at this time o'th' yer. What art' wantin', like? I hope thy feyther hasno' sent for glue, for I believe we ha' no' a cake i' th' shop."

"It's hardly likely ut my feyther 'll want owt o'th' sort o' this side Kesmas." And Dick grinned again, this time accompanying the act by a very clumsy and unintelligible wink.

"Theaw seems in a good temper this mornin', my lad," observed the shopkeeper, puzzled to account for the other's calling in; "but theaw ses nowt abeawt what theaw wants yet."

"Well, I coed a-seein' "—and just as Dick was proceeding to open the business he had called about, his attention was drawn to a figure that had glided unnoticed in at the shop-door, and was now making a pair of cur-

tains of the ample skirts of his father's "wrap-rascal."

The figure proved to be that of a little girl about six years old, over whose head an old black shawl was thrown, the same being tied about the neck with a skein of cotton. The face that could just be seen betwixt the foldings of this hood, was the colour of a well-sunned apple, — russetty red ; and appeared to be a face that under other circumstances would have been a bright and happy one ; but it was now covered with either rain or tears—perhaps with both.

"There's a little wench here wants summut, I reckon," said Dick, lifting up the child so that the hood and what was inside of it could be seen above the counter.

"What is it theaw wants, my little mop-pet?" demanded the shopkeeper in a not very encouraging tone ; at the same time turning to look at one of the account-boards behind him, which happened to be well filled with moons and stars and palisades.

The child sobbed twice previous to telling

its story, and the eyebrows of Old Dirty Thumbs lowered and contracted in proportion to the length and significance of the story which the timid lips unfolded.

“My mam’s poorly i’ bed,” said the poor little thing, fetching up another sob;—“an’ my dad’s gone to th’ teawn for cotton; an’ my mam wants to know if yo’ n be so good as let us have a quartern o’ meal for porritch an’ gruel; an’ when my dad’s *deawn** he’ll pay yo’ a’ th’ brass he brings toart what we owe yo.”

“Th’ owd tale,” observed Abraham, dashing his hand across the counter, and sweeping off a few unoffending crumbs; “but it winno do, it winno do. Theaw mun tell thy mam ut th’ shop-score’s up, an’ yo’ connot ha’ nowt no moore till it’s paid. I may do mysel eawt o’ th’ dur, if I’ll heed everyone ut comes.”

“Nobbut a quartern o’ meal,” sobbed the child.

“Not a thimble-full.”

* Finished his work.

“ Hoo — wants—it—for — gruel — an’—
an’ porritch.”

“ Hoo mum shake th’ poke, then, tell her ;
for yo’ mun ha’ no moore.”

The little hands went up to the hood,—they were red and blue with cold—the empty meal-bag she had brought dropped on the floor with a sound of desolateness that made Dick Robinson feel as though a whole winter’s chills were shooting through him,—then with a cry that could not come from other than a child overwhelmed at once with the anguish of maturer years, the poor suppliant for that day’s “ daily bread ” tottered as if in infant helplessness to the door.

So moved was Dick at this touching incident, that his hands had involuntarily clinched themselves until the knuckles were as white as ivory knobs ; and he felt for just a moment that planting four of them in the immediate vicinity of “ Old Ab’s ” capacious jaws, would afford considerable ease and relaxation to the muscles of his right arm. He restrained himself, however, by calling to mind the obliga-

tions he might be under to the offending shopkeeper, and instead of letting his hands fly across the counter with battering intentions, he employed them in the more serviceable exertion required in catching up the retreating child, and kissing it until its grief was calmed down to fitful sobbing.

“Here, Abraham,” said the young man, setting down the child, whose dripping garments had made quite a pool on the counter, “fill this poke wi’ as mich meal as hoo con carry, an’ we’n find a paymesther in a hawve a minit.”

“Art *theaw* gooin’ to be th’ paymesther?” demanded the shopkeeper, raising his eyebrows like two heavy box-lids.

“Ay, an’ for a good deecal moore yet,” returned the youth, with a great amount of energy expressed in his manner. “I’ll empty that *ark* for yo’, as full as it is, afore I’ve done.”

“It’s fuller nor I like on’t bein’,” observed the shopkeeper, with a grunt, evidently aimed at the badness of the times. “It’ll be a poor

Kesmas, I'm fceart, by th' way ut things are gooin' on. Heaw nich meal mun I weigh, did theaw say ? ” And Abraham dashed the shovel into the contents of the “ meal-ark.”

“ Put her a hawve a peck in : I think hoo may manage to carry it.”

“ That I'll do, lad.” And as the now mollified shopkeeper transferred the meal from the ark to the scales, which he set about in a manner so systematically slow that it stretched Dick's patience almost to snapping point, he sang, or hummed—

“ The birds without barn
Or storehouse are fed ;
From them may we learn
To trust for our bread.”

“ While yo're busy doin' that,” said Dick, interrupting the complacent Abraham in his lyrical tribute to the wisdom and goodness of Providence, “ I met as weel tell yo' what I co'ed abeawt.”

“ 'The Lord wi-ll prov-ide—ay, well, Dick, what is it ? Just howd that poke while I shutter th' meal in it, wilta ? 'Theere, that'll

do. Neaw my little wench, hie thee whoam, an' ate plenty o' porritch, an' theaw'll ha' cheeks as red as two little apples."

The child took the meal-bag in both hands—not an easy task for one so young—and with a smile of gratitude at her benefactor, that made the young man's heart feel as if reposing upon heaps of velvet cushions, toddled with its burden homewards.

"Neaw then, Dick," said Dirty Thumbs, "its no' so oft theaw comes an arrand ; but I reckon yo're plagued for somb'dy to goo a-shoppin' neaw Adelaide's laft yo'. Well, what con I do for thee ?"

"Han yo' any change abeawt yo' ?" asked Dick.

"Heaw mich for ? Is it copper or silver theaw wants ? I con find thee oather to a reasonable amewnt."

"Happen booath. Here's a hundert peawnd i' papper ; con yo' change that ?"

Abraham's eyebrows went up to an altitude they never reached only on extraordinary occasions ; and he untied his apron, and tied

it on afresh, as an act denoting the greatest degree of surprise.

“That looks too mich for thee to be eawt with so soon this mornin’,” he said. “I hope theaw hasno’ bin *findin’* it afore it wur *lost*.”

“Never mind, it’s *here*,” said Dick, pronouncing the last word with considerable emphasis. “An’ I con tell yo’ it’s come too far for me to ha’ fotcht it, for it’s come fro’ France, neaw then !”

“Fro’ France, has it !”

“Ay ; an’ what’s moore nor that, eawr Addy’s sent it ; an’ for t’ be gan away to th’ poor, too.”

“Eh, bless us ; theaw doesno’ say so ! Heaw mich hasta ?” And Dirty Thumbs leaned over the counter, as if eager to be clutching hold of the roll of notes that Dick had produced.

“A hundred peawnd i’ gradely solit rags,” the latter replied ; “an’ I want to get it int’ summut ut con be devided better, as soon as I con. Han yo’ getten so mich abeawt yo’ ?”

“Well, theaw con ha’ th’ part i’ *brass*,

an' th' t'other i' *shopstuff*, if that'll do," said Abraham, with an eye to doing a little profitable business.

"Let's have howd on it then," said Dick, impatiently, "for I want to be doin' o' summut."

"Well, I'll find thee fifty peawnd i' gowd an' silver neaw, an' I'll tell thee what theaw mun do. Get some papper, an' mak tickets eawt, same as they dun for dow (dole), an' they con come for ther stuff any time they'n a mind," and Abraham set two fitches of bacon a-swinging, struck a suspended ham with the butter knife, and knocked two wedges of cheese about, as if preparing to do an extraordinary amount of business in the wholesale line.

"I didno' see that before," said Dick, with the expression of one who had suddenly jumped out of a difficulty; "but there's sense in it."

"Gie me thy papper, then, an' let's look at it. Ay, it's of a good sort: five—ten—twenty, just so. Stop theere a minit, an see if

nob'dy runs away wi' thee while I fotch th' brass."

The worthy shopkeeper hereupon proceeded in his usually slow and deliberate manner to ascend the stairs; and after an absence of about ten minutes, occupied principally in producing such noises as suggested the removal of a load of lumber, returned to the shop, bringing along with him a couple of very strong canvas bags that were round and plump with substantial fatness.

"An' yo're Adelaide's sent it, has hoo?" observed Abraham, proceeding to untie the firmly-knotted strings that secured the bags.

"Well," replied Dick, "her feyther has, an' that's th' same thing. I like to think it's her, at any rate."

"Hoo's a fine wench, Dick, an' hoo'll mak' someb'dy a rare wife some day." And the shopkeeper sang—

"Alone to the banks of the dark-rolling Danube
Fair Adelaide hied when the battle was o'er."

"Here it is, Dick—forty peawnd i' butter-

cups, an ten i' daisies. I'll tak' ten yallow uns eawt ; then theaw con tak' th' tother, an' I'll land thee th' bags."

The gold and silver, which the shopkeeper was pleased to call *buttercups* and *daisies*, was carefully counted out, and after being replaced in the bags and secured as before, was consigned to the keeping of its new possessor.

"Neaw I'm off," said the latter, grasping hold of the treasure, and hugging it to his person, as if he had suddenly grown into a miser. "I'll wind someb'dy their clock up afore lung, an' set it a-gooi', mind if I dunno. Good mornin', Abraham, an' thank yo'."

"Dunno' forget thoose *tickets*, Dick."

"Nawe ; I'll see what my feyther ses abeawt 'em when I get whoam. It doesno' rain as fast as it did. I think the sun 'll be breakin' eawt e'enneaw."

Dick's sun had "broken out" long since, but it was not yet at its meridian, though it shone brighter than the sun of a southern sky ; a splendour undimmed by aught that

conscience could obtrude in form of clouds or mist—the serenity of a noble and generous heart, seeking to pour warm rays of loving-kindness into homes that Want had made cold and gloomy.

Away he sped, lightly and airily as if it had been a bright summer morning, though it was blowing and raining then as fiercely as ever, and the snow came down in blinding flakes, that made him wink and dodge about like a man drunk with other things than joy. Away he sped, however, down lanes where cottages were throndest and most likely to be in need; peeping through windows to see if hearths were blazing; listening at doors to hear if shuttles were going, and glancing at ash-mounds for recently-emptied ashes that would indicate the newly-replenished fire-grate. These signs were fewer, he discovered, than was consistent with the presence of good times; and the young man sped the more swiftly on his journey homeward.

The door of one small “two-loomed” cottage happening to be partially open as Dick

was passing, curiosity prompted him to step across the threshold just to say "good morning" to its inmates.

Strange, there was no one to say "good morning" to except the little girl he had met at the shop. And what a picture here presented itself to the young man's contemplation!

Standing upon a little stool, placed so near to the fender that it might have been a part of it, her frock tucked up and pinned behind her to prevent it's taking fire, the child, with a demeanour that belonged to maturer years, was busy stirring with a spoon something that was slowly simmering in a pan over a very low fire.

Dick's heart leaped to his mouth as he stood gazing on this picture; and strange reflections hurried themselves through his mind, and strange feelings took possession of his breast.

"What art' doin'?" he said very tenderly, as if afraid of startling the little dame.

"Makkin gruel for my mam," replied the

child, looking up from her task, but without leaving hold of the spoon.

“ An’ does theaw know heaw ?”

“ Ay ; I’ve made mony a time when my dad’s bin away.”

“ Well, an’ art no’ fceart o’ gettin’ ov a foyer, or summut ?”

“ Nawe ; I aulus mind that ;” and the little nurse turned again to her task, as unconcernedly as though she had not met with the slightest interruption.

“ Well, by George !” Dick exclaimed, with a savage earnestness in his manner unusual to him ; “ there’s one hawve o’th’ woald isno’ fit fort’ live ; if they are I’ll go to Jericho upo’ crutches ! Here, I’ve been browt up as marred as a *wye cauwe*,* ut’s bin licked with its moather till it con do nowt for itsel’. An’ I believe I’m noane th’ wust, noather. Ther’s theawsunts o’ great big childer just neaw as snug i’ ther neests as a hatch o’ young thros-tles. An’ they’n ha’ ther clooas warnt for ’em ; an’ they’n be browt deawn th’ stairs i’

* Female calf.

shawls an' blankets ; an' everythin' made as cozy for 'em as a new fettlet hearthstone. An' this little thing here's nussin it's moather—like a hangel ut hasno' had reawm fort' thrive in ;—bin foragin', too, ov a mornin' like this ; an' neaw puttin' its own breakfast off till it's done summut for its moather ! Oh Addy, Addy !” he said, as he dashed out of the house—two big tears rolling down his cheeks at the time — “ what theaw would ha' done if theaw'd bin here ;—takken that poor little chicken's place, an' put it under th' owd hen's wing, an' nussed 'em booath till thern fit to turn eawt i' wynt an' rain. But I'll do summut yet. I'll *feight*,—ay, that I will—I'll feight. *These* shall be my sodiers,” he said, holding the money-bags before his eyes. “ They'n do as I tell 'em, as sure as bacon's deead pig. No better sarvants nowheere ; no better *feighters*, noather. Here are two regiments—as breet as pewter pints they are ; an they'n tak' Irkdale by storm ; an' ther'll be sich sheawtin' an' singin' as never wur ; an' when th' battles o'er ther shall be nob'dy laft

skrikin' upo' th' fielt;" and Dick marched down the lane with the pride of a warrior certain of victory upon his brow, only with this difference, that instead of its being of that questionable lustre which foreshadows the desolation of homes and provinces, it partook more of the cloudless serenity which beams from the countenance of a saint.

CHAPTER XVIII.

“ Poor owd crayther ! he’s done wi’ this woald, Nanny : I fear he has—I fear he has. He’s *set his last peg*,* an’ neaw he’s nowt to do but tumble o’er into th’ saw-pit, an’ be forgotten ! It looks strange, Nanny—sittin’ here, pooin’ ther last at life’s *bant*,† wi’ nob’dy carin’ for ’em, nobbut two owd simpletons like thee an’ me ; nob’dy to put ther cheek to his, an’ shut his een wi’ nice, soft fingers, an’ prattle to him like little childer i’ ther sleep.”

Jacob Robinson was standing over the still sleeping postman, and discoursing in this strain, when his son Dick, like a half-drowned but jolly rat, returned from his expedition.

* Measured his last length, as a sawyer.

† String.

“Husht, Dick,” said Nanny, speaking in a solemn tone, and with a shake of the head that never lent itself to mock gravity; “th’ owd felly’s nicely asleep, an’ it ’ud be a pity to wakken him. When he wakkens ov hissels we’n try to get him to bed. Poo thy weet things off as quietly as theaw con, for theaw looks welly dreawnt.”

“Hast gotten change for thoose notes?” Jacob inquired in a subdued voice. “Theaw’s no ’casion to sheawt o’er tellin me.”

To do Dick justice, he had been speculating on the possibility of a very noisy demonstration taking place on his return home, occasioned by preparations for appropriating the money he had been changing; and to have his mouth stopped when he was bursting to give a good ringing shout of joy, was like forcing back the cork into the neck of a champagne bottle after the string had been cut.

Dick, however, held himself as well as he could, and swallowed his disappointment as we swallow pills. To his father’s inquiries

he gave fragmentary answers ; but came at last to an understanding that made even the naturally "cross-grained" Jacob deliver comments expressive of satisfaction. But when he mentioned the case of the little girl he had met with at old Dirty Thumbs' shop, and the probability of her having to go home empty-handed had it not been for his accidental presence, the joiner, as if forgetting the kind of behaviour he had enjoined upon his son, seized the fire-poker, and administered such a blow to the top bar as scattered cinders about the hearth and startled their guest out of his sleep.

"Eh, John, John !" he exclaimed, upon discovering his mistake, "I'd quite forgotten mysel. In my mind I're knockin' owd Dirty Thumbs' legs fro' under him, for an owd rascal as he is. If it hadno' bin for folk gettin' thersels int' his books, he'd never ha' had as fast howd o'th' lung puss (purse) as he has neaw ; for he doesno' forget to sell things at his own price. We'n buy what we want off him *this* time, Dick, an' then I'll—I'll

thresh him, Dick—I'll thresh him." And relieving himself, in his mind, of the obligation imposed by this threat, the incensed joiner replaced the poker in its niche against the hob.

"Neaw," Jacob resumed, turning again to the postman, "caw'r Nanny's shaket a bed up for yo', an' yo'n be moore comfortable in it nor here; so if yo'n a mind I'll help yo' up-stairs as weel as I con, an' cover yo' up nicely."

"If it wurno' for *one* thing, Jacob, I could wish they'rn coverin' me up wi' summut else nor blankets," returned the old man, with a sigh that appeared to exhaust him.

"What *is* that one thing?" Jacob inquired.

"Ther's nob'dy to drop rosemary ont' my coffin, say nowt abeawt a tear. I'm by mysel here, Jacob, lonely—lonely. When we entered Leipsic, Jacob, I see'd a bursted shell wi' four deead childer reawnd it, an' a moather cryin' o'er 'em. That seet has bin afore my een ever sin', an' that moather's cries han kept ringin' i' my ears. Hoo're *lonely*, then, Ja-

cob ; an' so am I neaw. God ha' mercy on us a' ! ”

It was a short prayer ; but the Being to whom it was addressed heard it, as will be seen ere this tale be told.

“ Abeawt an heaur's rest, Jacob,” continued the old man, as the joiner helped him over the floor, “ an' then, if th' weather's fit, I may hobble whoam.”

Yes ; but to what *home* ?

The weather cleared up as the day advanced, and ere noon a calm—a gentle calm, that looked like the sleep of nature, fell upon Irkdale. The battle-field seemed to have closed over its dead, and victor and vanquished were smoking the pipe of peace together. It was the lull after much strife, in which both belligerents fall from exhaustion, and grasp hands as they fall. The forest stretched its arms and wiped its wounds in uncomplaining silence ; and the river toned down its wailing cry to the murmur which seemed to “ babble ” of summer, as if it

yearned to be kissing flowers as it danced down its way. If the sun shone not upon burnished arms, nor made rivers of blood redder by its glow, it gave to the face of earth a joyful and triumphant expression. The cottages that but a few hours ago looked forlorn and storm-battered, now put on a trim appearance, as if pulsations of happiness, caused by some electric agency, were throbbing simultaneously through each.

Dick Robinson had made a hurried visit to most of the poorer dwellings, and promised succour where hope existed not before; and once more Irkdale was to be the Irkdale of former years, when feasting and revelry—such humble revelry as the poor make, which counts not upon waste and debauchery in its sources of enjoyment—would make hearts glad that had been pining over months of unclamoured-of privations.

It was a sight for an emperor, was that first demonstration of joy! Neighbours ran about and blessed each other as they met, such a humanizing influence has kindness: and it

they blessed each other, what might have been the grateful heart-pourings towards Him who “feeds the young ravens,” and towards the scarcely less than divine instruments through whom His beneficence was on this occasion ministered? And all this good—this happiness—at a less cost than my Lord Nobody’s hunting dinner, or his latest plunge into sensual pleasures!

“ Oh, ye Divines,

Who preach damnation to the poor who err,
And err, too, through Necessity’s harsh will,
How must the scourge be warped about his loins
Who, with a power to bless in countless ways,
Casts off the nobler purpose, and pursues
A course of wanton folly!”

With the first blink of the sun through the gaps of parting clouds, Dick Robinson was out upon his errand. At its setting he had finished his task; and so overpowered was he by the scenes he had witnessed,—so affected by the transports of joy which must have been contagious, that he felt it impossible to settle down into his usual disposition, without

having recourse to his father's mode of treating kindred feelings, a dose of old Johnny Smithels' never-failing specific.

For this purpose, our young friend turned his giddy footsteps towards the door of the "Jolly Jumper," and was welcomed to the interior of that establishment by as sunny a smile as ever shone over the half-door of the bar of a British "public."

"Good e'enin, Richart," said old Mally, turning on her smiling power to its brightest register. "It's rayther finer nor it has bin. Goo thy ways into th' kitchen, lad, — an' theaw'll find a good foyer, but no' so mich company."

"Oh, it's gone quite warm," Dick observed, wondering at the time what people could want with large fires at such a genial season. "Whoa han yo' gotten i'th' nook yonder?"

"It's a drunken good-for-nowt ut's bin skeawbankin* here a' day," replied Mally, putting her smiles behind a frown. "I've

* Sponging.

towd him mony a time to goo whoam, but he ses he's no *whoam* to go to."

"Dun yo' know him?"

"Know him? ay, — an' I've seen him different to what he is neaw. He's gotten a *bad wife*; an' bad wives setten mony a good husbant agate o' drinkin'. He's done nowt else this six months, I'm sure."

"Whoa is he?"

"Wheay, does no' theaw know him?"

"It is no' George Lightoller, is it?"

"It's nob'dy else, theaw'll see, if theaw'll nobbut look at him gradely."

The person to whom this conversation referred was sitting or rather leaning on an arm-chair by the kitchen fire, with his chin sunk upon his breast and his feet thrown out as if in sleep.

He started as Dick entered the kitchen, and involuntarily grasping an empty pint pot which stood on the dresser at his elbow, muttered something about there being "no more seed in the box."

"Young man," said he, addressing Dick,

and raising a pair of eyes that appeared to be much swollen with drink,—“ I like your face. I think I see a *pint* in it, or a *gill* at the least. Will it be one ?”

“ I think not, no’ this time,” replied Dick, in a tone which, though firm in its refusal, was expressive of commiseration, “yo’n had enough, I think, by the looks on yo’.”

“ Come, just a gill.”

“ Not a drop.”

“ Save life.”

“ I’ve sed it.”

“Humph! everybody’s alike. Because I’m down in the world, I can’t get even a poor gill o’ beer.” And George Septimus Lightoller, the once proud and well-to-do cashier, who carried his front as smooth and glossy as a man made of porcelain; who wore his clothes as neat as a “new pin;” who signed cheques and made out drafts for thousands sterling in a day, and who looked upon a drunkard as a thing to be kicked out of the way like a rotten cabbage,—now begged for a “poor gill o’ beer,” and was refused by one

whom he would have regarded as a section of a huge machine, that did society's scavenging, blacked its boots, and laid clean straw for its dainty feet to tread upon. "What a falling off was there!" He might well say—"Humph!"

"If ther's owt yo' want i'th' mayte way," said Dick, "I'll no' be within givin' yo' a good blow cawt: but drink I winno stond."

"*Meat!*" exclaimed Mr Lightoller, contemptuously, "what do *I* want with meat, or food of any kind? I've tasted none to-day, nor yesterday. I want none—I want none. If you would save my life, let me have some beer. You don't know how thirsty I am."

"Here," said Mrs Smithels, tripping into the kitchen with a measure of the "life-preserver" in her hand, which she placed before the drunken man,—“this is th' last yo' mun have, whoever orders it. Yo're wurr nor a soof; that yo' are. Neaw, then—afore yo' taste, promise me yo'll goo whoam, an' try to get sober.”

"I will, I will," was the response.

Mr Lightoller then raised the pot to his lips, a feat which required the application of both hands—gave a pull that absorbed nearly the whole of its contents; and as he replaced the empty pot upon the table, Dick could see that tears were rolling down his cheeks.

“Is there nobody, I wonder, that would knock my brains out?” exclaimed the wretched inebriate, as he staggered across the floor, and made menacing gestures at his shadow. “Young man, give me your hand. No offence, I hope.”

Dick extended his hand, in the palm of which he had secreted a piece of money, and the two shook hands in a very loose and unconventional manner.

“What’s this?” said Mr Lightoller, gazing dreamily at the coin which had found its way into his possession. “Silver! Yes, a real half-crown! It’s some time since I saw one. Take it back, young man. I don’t want it. It would do me no good, *now*—I’m past it, I’m past it. If I was to take it home it would melt like a lozenge. It would,

young man, it would.” Then bursting into tears afresh, he expressed a hope—not unintelligible to his audience—that “*she—she*” would be dead when he reached home. With that he staggered out of the kitchen, and was heard of no more.

“Eh, Dick, Dick,” said Mally, with a shake of the head that was meant to convey reproof, “what it is to have some sort o’ wives! When we fust started o’ sellin’ drink, I never see’d a womman get moore nor a gill at a time; an’ then very seldom. But neaw, dear me, what they will but do! Drink, an’ bet, an’ talk abeawt hoss-racin’, just as if they’d bin born in a stable, an’ had gotten ther larnin’ eawt ov what they coen a handicap book. Theaw sees yon chap had welly a peawnd a day comin’ in oncet, an’ he never spent nowt hissel; an’ when he thowt he’re gettin’ on toart bein independent, he fund he wurno wo’th a sengle hawpenny-piece. His wife had spent it as fast as he’d gotten it. It drove him mad, Dick; an’ he’s drunken like a madman ever sin’, whenever he could

get owt to drink. To my thinkin', if I're young chap I'd live sengle a' th' days o' my life, sooner nor risk havin' a drunken wife; for ther's no tellin' heaw they may turn cawt. But I think theaw never did any sweetheartin', Dick."

The young man replied only by a scratch behind the ear. It was as good a confession, though, as he could have made even with words. He never *had* been guilty of sweet-hearting—not he.

"Theaw's more sense, I da' say," continued the dame; a compliment that Dick hardly felt himself entitled to. "But I mun say ut ther's a difference, and a great difference, too, i' wimmen; an' we can hardly tell heaw they'n behave thesels when they set cawt. Neaw look at Missis Lightoller,—what a prim madam hoo wur oncet: just for a' th' woult like a orniment ut should be takken deawn an' dusted every mornin'. Neaw I'd hardly get howd ov her wi' th' tongs,—hoo's sich a mop."

Dick thought of Adelaide Wilson, and contrasted her in his mind with the "mop" in

question ; and the image of the dear girl, made fairer and lovelier than ever by the contrast, was as distinctly before his eyes as she was on that evening she bade him remember her when far away.

“Yo’n bin paintin’, I see,” he observed, with a view to changing the subject of their conversation, which he was afraid would prove too much for his feelings if further continued.

“Eh, ay, that we have,” replied Mally, seeming by her lively manner to have something delightful to communicate ; “we’d Pot-hook here th’ t’other day ; an’ as smart, he wur, as a *club cap*.^{*} I hardly knew him at th’ fust. ‘Mally,’ he sed, as soon as he geet in, ‘this spear wants paintin’.’ ‘Ay,’ I sed ; ‘but ther’s a *ale-shot* on it ut wants payin’ an rubbin’ eawt afore we can paint it.’ ‘Well,’ he sed, ‘here’s th’ brass ;’ an’ wi’ that he threw

* In many Lancashire villages, even at the present day, the show of gaily-coloured caps at a women’s club-feast, is an event to be talked about for weeks after it takes place.

deawn a suverin—a gradely gowden suverin—upo’ th’ table. ‘Eh, Pothook!’ I sed, ‘is that thee?’ an’ he sed it wur him: an’ rayly I stared; an’ rayly eawr Johnny stared; an’ th’ shot wur paid an’ wiped off straight for-rud; an’ he tarried a’ day; an’ eawr Johnny and *him* geet as drunken as two foos afore they parted. That wife ov his had turnt eawt a gradely good un, he towld us. Hoo’^d had some brass left her,—a good decal, I believe,—an’ they’n set up a shop, an’ are doin’ weel. So there’s th’ difference i’ two wives, theaw sees. Well, we’d th’ spear painted then; an’ if my mind keeps as it is, we’n never have it chalked o’er agen.”

“Well, I’m fain to yer this news abeawt Pothook,” said Dick, with an expression of unfeigned joy radiating from his countenance. “I aulus thowt ther wur wurr folk nor him i’ th’ woald.”

“Ay, ther’s mony a dacent body ut is no’ reckont so, becose it taks a good deal fort’ keep ’em straight, theaw sees. An’ then ther *is* folk ut ’ud never owe a farthen-piece if they

could help it. But sometimes they're like to do ; an' it's a pity ther charicter has t' suffer, when they're as honest at th' bottom as th' best o' folk, an' would do as weel if they knew heaw."

"It is, Mally ; an' they would do."

"God help 'em then !"

"HE IS DOIN'."

Dick by this time had consumed his first "pint," and ordering a second,—a demand which seemed to the astonished landlady so indicative of a downward tendency on the part of her usually temperate customer, that she hesitated before complying,—he ensconced himself so cozily in the chimney-nook that the very chair-backs about him took the form and character of so many fortresses, erected to prevent Care from ever laying waste the comforts of that hearth.

And now the fire, which had been doing a little preparatory blinking, in addition to emitting a rich red glow from the bars, gave a sudden shunt, that split in twain a large "cob" which had been placed on the top ;

and the blaze flashed and roared up the chimney afresh, as if starting into new life.

The fumes arising from Dick's modest potation had begun to exercise a kind of dreamy influence over his susceptible fancy; and he saw shapes in the bars, and in the blaze, and in the smoke, that were to him the people of a shadow-world,—mimicking with fantastic gestures the struggles and pleasures, the sympathies and hopes, as they ebb and flow and throb and burn in this real world we inhabit.

In the still, bright red that made a sunset on the hearth-flag he saw luxury and ease enjoying in rosy tranquillity the summer flowers and autumn's fruits of life. In the blaze which laughed and rollicked about the grave old "rack-an'-hook," youth essayed to make time fleeter,—fleeter by its own eagerness to catch the phantom pleasure,—skimming through space on deceitful wing that mocks the pursuer as it leads him on. In the black, melancholy smoke were blighted hopes and down-

cast fortunes,—faded pleasures and the dust of strangled aspirations. All these Dick watched until watching became no longer possible ; and his head went down upon the table with a gradual but fitful inclination, that produced nods and jerks, as if groping for a pillow where none softer than a block of sycamore could be found.

Dream on, Dick, now that thine head hath found a resting-place—a pillow which may seem hard, but softer to thee than is the finest down to some of thy kind. Dream on—there is a kind spirit watching over thee, who will touch thine eyelids with a magic finger, and show thee what coming years may bring. 'Thou hearest now thy name mingled with a hundred blessings,—lisp'd by infant lips, and swelling from hearts whose thankful praise succeeds to pangs of sorrow. Thou seest the hearth bright that ere the morn was bleak and cold. Thou seest glad smiles around laden tables—tables that were crumbless before ; and all this bright picture fashioned out of thy good heart, which the

Great God above hath spoken through in mercy to His poorer children.

Dream on, Dick, and look further into the future! An angel comes to thee, in sable garments clad; and she looks on thee with tender but mournful eyes, and calls thee brother. And she bears a lesser angel in her arms, that puts out its tiny hands to thee, and clasps them round thy neck. And thou kissest that little angel, Dick, and worshippest it, as though it were a part of thine own being, that had wandered far away and now returned. Two old people watch thy transports, and laugh and weep as thou dost. They are fading from the earth, Dick, and seem to point heavenward as their forms recede and become less distinct. Then the elder angel, whose garments change to snowy whiteness, takes thine arm; and ye both are now wandering together over fairy-meadows, and through enchanted groves, where the moonlight is not of earth, but belongs to some world that Love alone hath created.

Do not waken yet, Dick, for there is

mourning at home. The messenger who brought joy to Irkdale hath sped on *another* journey. Wind and rain and snow shall not buffet him there; but his gray, matted locks, that few pitied save thee and thine, will soon be transformed into threads of gold; and the coronet, awarded only to those who have done the true work of life on earth, shall gird his brow, and shine there—a glory everlasting!

CHAPTER XIX.

CONCLUSION.

TIME rolled on, and once a month during four years the postman (old John's successor) never failed to bring welcome news of Adelaide to the Odd House. At last came a letter with a mourning border, but directed in *her* hand, so that it could not be Adelaide who was dead. On opening the letter Dick discovered for the first time that she, whose image had never left his memory one waking moment, was no longer Adelaide *Wilson*; that she had changed her name the first year after her return to France, by marrying a clerk in her father's employ. "An exemplary young man, and a kind husband, who was worthy of all the love her heart could bestow upon him." Such wrote Adelaide. But now he was no

more. Consumption had swept him off, and she, afraid that the malady might seize upon her, begged that she might be permitted to return to her old home in Irkdale.

Why did she ask ? why not come at once ?

“ Hoo met ha’ savet th’ post-stamp,” old Jacob remarked, as he turned the letter every-side up to read it.

“ Dick, get thy papper an’ write like a scholar to her, or else I will ; an’ tell her t’ come i’th’ fastest ship ut th’ French han gotten, but I da’say they’re nowt like eaur’s : an’ hoo’st have a whoam here as lung as we live.”

The young man required no second asking. The letter was indited and posted in less than an hour, which was regarded as quite a feat in correspondence. The following week Adelaide arrived in Manchester ; and “ Ajax ” was put in commission to fetch up her luggage to Irkdale.

Dick was in twenty minds to dress the stupid animal in ribbons, and make quite a May-day spree of the journey. But it would be too tedious a task ; for he was eager to be

moving in the direction of the railway station, as the young lady might possibly arrive hours before she expected. "Joe-at-Clinkers" volunteered to accompany him. Being Saturday afternoon, the smith had blown out his fire and given up work for the day; so the two cronies promised each other a jolly "out" of it—a promise which they realized to the fullest extent.

Arriving at the "Bank Top" station of the London and North Western Railway, our friends were informed that it would be two hours ere the next train from the south was due; so leaving "Ajax" in the care of a boy who was loitering about the station, they set out for a stroll round the city.

Dick had never seen much of Manchester, and on that account was anxious to explore localities that were to him as yet an unknown—unpeopled world. Leaving the Infirmary to their right, the two young men struck into a street where the grandest warehouses and the dingiest dwellings contrasted with each other in the most painfully anomalous degree.

Being struck by the glaring red curtain hung in the window of a very small beerhouse, Dick suggested a call, just to see if a pint of Manchester ale was anything like the article which found so much favour with the frequenters of the "Jolly Jumper;" and meeting with no opposition from his companion, who declared himself to be as "dry as soot," the two walked in.

Neither Dick nor Joe liked the appearance of the house on their first acquaintance with the interior; but having seated themselves in a room that smelled very strongly of tobacco and musty beer barrels, they could not think of leaving without calling for something. Accordingly the former rung a very hoarse bell, and during the time that elapsed ere any one in the capacity of waiter appeared, he employed himself in taking stock of the general features of the room.

A gilt card over the mantelpiece informed them that "Bell's Life and Sporting Life" were "taken in." Near this card hung a paper containing the entries of a proposed

raffle for a couple of pictures representing a pair of prize-fighters, with the usual short hair and angelic faces. Another card gave further information that "commissions" were "executed on all racing events;" a piece of intelligence that hardly came within the sphere of their comprehension. The walls were covered with *supposed* portraits of favourite race-horses, all very much alike, and each mounted by a hunch-backed rider who appeared proud of his deformity. In the centre of the room hung a sporting parrot, who was continually offering "five to one against Ratcatcher," without "getting on" a single bet. Heaps of badly-printed and dirty-looking newspapers lay on the tables, and the floor was littered over with tobacco ashes, fragments of spills, and sawdust from capsized spittoons.

"Was you ringing here?" inquired a portly, brandy-faced landlady, brushing into the room and giving a very impudent stare at her customers.

"A pint ov ale," said Dick Robinson, and the landlady vanished.

“I say, Dick, I’m sure I know yon face ; doesno’ theaw ?” said Joe-at-Clinkers, with an expression of surprise in his countenance.

“I conno say I do,” Dick replied.

“By the derry, but I’ll see !” and Joe immediately stepped out of the room to read the signboard outside.

Joe was right. The sign informed him that the house was kept by — “*Louisa Dashwood*,” who was “licensed to sell beer and porter by retail,” &c. &c.

“*So—come to this at last !*” was the young man’s exclamation as he re-entered the house. “Her ut should ha’ had Alfred Herbert, an’ ut they sed wur wo’t’h her theawsands—sellin’ ale in a jerry shop ! well—ther’s no tellin’ !”

What further explorations our friends made in this vice-infested locality does not concern this story. The time the train was said to be due had arrived, and the two were now upon the station, anxiously looking out for the object of their presence there.

It came at last. A whistle shrieked louder and longer than the rest ; and amidst

a cloud of steam, bravely finishing its journey, the London train dashed into the station.

To find Adelaide was but the work of a moment. Dick had observed a white handkerchief waving out of one of the carriage windows as the train was stopping, and he was at this window before his companion knew what he was about.

“ Oh, Dick ! ”

“ Eh, Addy ! ”

What a kiss ? The *first* Dick had ever received from Adelaide ; and the young man went off in a transport of joy that made him seize hold of a porter, and hug him like a brother.

Adelaide stepped eagerly out of the carriage, bringing with her a little rosy boy about two years old, that Dick set to work upon as if the child had been a piece of lolly-pop, and whom the mad fellow was seen carrying about the station “ neck-saddle ” fashion, before his mother had had time to adjust his overclothes.

What a welcome there was for the young

and still blooming widow ; and how it seemed as though she had never left them. The news flew abroad like the sound of wedding bells, and ere night the "Jolly Jumper" had its walls so shaken that "Old Johnny" declared the house would require "stayin' like a loom." It was the first time Dick Robinson had been allowed to associate with his father and the latter's tavern cronies, but there in the middle of the kitchen the young man stood, and holding a "pint" in a remarkably unsteady hand, declared it was "th' preawdest an' th' comfortablest" day of his life ; and if he "dee'd then, he could goo eawt o'th' woald beawt a kick or a flasker, or as mich as a yearnin' fort' come back agen." Happy Dick !

Another year hath passed—a strange, eventful year ; and now what sound is that which strikes upon the ear and lingers there in mournful cadence ? It is the passing-bell. Jacob Robinson—fallen like a leaf in autumn—is being gathered to his fathers, who sleep in the little grave-yard of Irkdale. The

coffin is being borne by the stoutest of his surviving comrades, and in its wake follow his son Dick with Adelaide Wilson leaning on his arm—even more beautiful in her grief than when we saw her in the church porch listening to the organ, with her father by her side. Old Nanny is too infirm to accompany her good man on his last journey; but others follow who shall make few more such journeys; yet they look on Death as if he were an old friend, waiting to welcome them to his kindly home.

Now the impressive service is read,—the corpse is borne out of the church and lowered to its last resting-place,—friends gather round the grave, and as “*ashes to ashes*” is being pronounced, and lumps of clay are heard to strike the coffin-lid, each eye seems to say in its tearful expression—*The last of a good man is fading from us.* Let him rest! He is worthy of his sleep!

Listen to that bell once more! Now it hath a merry voice; and there are gay young

people rushing across the churchyard, and forming an avenue opposite the church door. What procession is this now entering the gates, and upon which all eyes are fixed? What!—our old acquaintances—“Joe-at-Clinkers” and “Mally o’ Jammie’s?” Have you then made it up at last to take each other “for better for worse,” after five years’ courtship? And who are these that follow? No—yes: Dick Robinson and Adelaide Wilson: groomsmen and bridesmaids, I declare! I never saw Dick look better, or happier; and Adelaide is just the Adelaide she was five years ago. A little older, certainly; but scarcely so as to be perceptible. There is a whisper circulating that this is to be a *double* event. But people *will* talk. They cannot see why Dick and Adelaide ought not to be more nearly related, now that the former has taken his father’s place, and the latter has been broken to matrimony already. Well, let them have it so: I am content to wait until the marriage register can be consulted. In the mean time—ring, bells! shout, young

people! Pray that happiness may attend on those who deserve it; amongst whom, none shall be deemed more worthy than our young friends, Dick Robinson and Adelaide ——.

Reader, fill up the blank thine own way. Say, how wouldst thou have it?

THE END.

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